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Physicality and the Edmonton Electronic Dance Music Experience

by

Rob Kelly   Ⓒ

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Music

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 2001

University of Alberta

Inversely Income Elastic Ordinary Demand Functions

by

Tom Yang

Department of Economics

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1996

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Physicality and the Edmonton Electronic Dance Music Experience* submitted by Rob Kelly in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

ABSTRACT

Encountering meaning as somehow directly related to the tangible, to our bodies and physical senses has recently begun to be explored in music and dance studies. This theses explores electronic dance music as fundamentally physical, studying how physical characteristics of an experience (sound, light, chemicals, and motion) shape a particular, personal music experience. Drawing on ethnographic research in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, this thesis examines three aspects of a dance experience: sound, physical context, and state. After analyzing a track and a set, both basic musical building blocks of the sounds of dance music, I locate the experience of those sounds in a particular spaces. I then consider how the bodies that experience dance music act (through movement, dancing) and are acted upon (through chemicals).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Chapter 1: Setting the Stage

My story begins in an arena used for large events such as home or agriculture shows, just northeast of downtown Edmonton, with ample parking, police in uniform standing at the door, and loudspeakers in the parking lot advising people to not leave valuables in their cars and that drugs are not permitted inside the building.

At 3:15 A.M. I am sitting on a bench by the bathroom, chatting with Douglas and Catherine. I just met them moments ago. They're from Calgary; they're toying with the idea of getting married, and while my old roommate Jay, who just walked up, is discussing financial planning with Catherine, Douglas and I are talking about marriage – I just told him I'm married and he's wondering what it's like, if it's a lot different from living together. He works as a graphic designer but says his real love is music.

We are sitting by the bathroom because it is quiet enough to talk comfortably. The doorway three meters away from us opens into the huge, main room, where Sasha and Digweed, two British DJs, are playing a 7-hour marathon of non-stop, sometimes painfully loud music, the sound echoing off of the concrete floors and block walls. They're the 'headliners,' the main DJs people came to hear at this event, called the "Northern Lights - Rhythm Arts Festival." The music started at 9:00 pm and will not stop until 6:00 am. Considered relatively small for the size of the venue, something

many blamed on the high ticket prices ($35-$45), "Northern Lights" features eleven DJs and approximately two thousand dancers.

To give my email address to Douglas, I get up to get a pen from a police officer standing nearby, who tells me about the teenager he just arrested for selling marijuana out of a car, and while he realizes "most people" come just to enjoy the music and dance, there is a real "cesspool" of drugs at this event. A girl in a pink cowboy hat and reflective blue pants standing nearby turns away. After giving my address to Douglas, whom I never expect to (or do) hear from again, I head back to the crowd on the dance floor and the world of lights, sounds, dressed up people, and fun. The music is almost moving, lasers and computer graphics light up huge screens suspended from the ceiling, and I feel as if I am part of another world.

A year later, in Toronto, author Anik See, after reading through an early version of my thesis, attended a dance club featuring the same kind of music played at "Northern Lights." She describes this experience in the short story *This is a True Story*:

> *I'm slipping in and out of consciousness with the music. Whether it's exhaustion or trance, I don't know. It's my first time. There is a video of binary code and flickering alphabets, DNA sequences and fast, close-up skims along the surfaces of impossible buildings flaring on one entire wall of the club. I like the binary code. Streams of 1001000010010000001111 0100001010100101001010010000000111110101010101010101010010101010*

*10101000000001010101011111010100010101000111101010010010000110
0000000101010100100010101010010100111000001010101100110100010100
000000100 flashing up vertically ones changing to os and os changing to
ones flash flash*

*The infinite possibilities of 0s and 1s fit with the gunkgunkgunkgunkgunk of
the music. I'm trying to figure out if what I am witnessing on the dancefloor
is collective individualism or individualistic collectivism. Heads bob, each
in their own beat. The occasional arm explodes above them, catching the
split-second strobe of a light already twisting away towards another flash
split-second point, like a washing machine agitator on speed, broken from
its foundation. At any given moment, there are a handful of people
scattered throughout the crowd, each grinning their own grin, nodding
violently when they grasp exactly how [DJ] Max is mixing the music. A
second later, a different handful of people break into grins, grasping
something different again, the things they like to hear. Everyone is
reaching into the music, which has already reached into us. We are
reaching into ourselves, imploding, we think, and then BOOM there is an
explosion, a new beat that Max has brought up, brings us outside of
ourselves, reaches away, unbounded, limitless, everything possible. There
are twenty men for every woman. We are here. We are young. And
invincible. We sense some sort of power, a gestaltist power. A collective*

> *power greater than all of our own put together. At this moment. And we*
>
> *love it.* (Unpublished)

Her prose captures many of the same qualities of my dance experience in Edmonton – the loud music, the lights, the dancing, the immediacy - a belonging to a type of dance floor world. It is also remarkably similar in what she calls "individualism." We feel we are part of a world, that world is very similar in two different cities, but that world is a world that is also "reaching into ourselves," something different for each participant in that world.

The tension between a sense of community and a sense of individualism is the starting point of this paper. In defining more or less discrete communities based on shared elements or ideals among participants in that group (Hebdige 1979), subcultural studies have been critiqued for assuming a problematic homogeneity within those communities, to the exclusion of such things as gender (McRobbie 1980). Dance music further challenges the possibility of a 'subculture' as such, simply through its unique sense of the individual. I was no more or less a member of a world than See, who, in turn, was no more or less a member of a community than any of the other dancers in Toronto. A community based largely on foggy notions of 'we' on a dance floor might best be understood as a collection of individual experiences of a type of physical dance world.

In this paper I ask how an individual experience means, not through identity with a group or style, but as a physical, individual activity. Encountering meaning as somehow directly related to the tangible, to our bodies and physical senses shows up in recent discussions in film (Asman, 2001), dance (Sklar 2000), gender (McCaughey 1998), and ethnomusicology (Feld 1996, Qureshi 2000). These discussions tend to focus on how physical characteristics of sounds, spaces, instruments, and bodies create and shape meanings within and as social contexts. Using this focus on the physical as a springboard, my study identifies a dance music experience as fundamentally physical, exploring how physical characteristics of that experience (sound, light, chemicals, and motion) shape a particular, personal music experience. I tackle that 'personal music experience,' a slippery notion at best, in three steps: sound, context, and state, progressing from the most easily 'texted' aspects of dance music, the 'music itself,' to the most physical aspects of the experience of that music. In the next chapter I categorize all aural experience under the larger category of sound. I address basic genre distinctions, and suggest that dance music shifts a typical popular music experience from song and song message to texture and set. In the third chapter I examine the physical context of the Edmonton dance scene, concluding that the visual aspects of dance spaces play a key role in the creation of dance experiences, paralleling the textures of music with textures of light and motion. In the fourth chapter I explore the role of drugs and physical movement in the dance experience.

What is Dance Music?

I use "dance music" to refer to a range of musics grouped loosely by a shared experience of electronic sounds, extravagant lights, and dance. That music is almost always created electronically, pressed onto vinyl, and then played by a DJ on a set of two turntables. Dance music is generally played and danced to, or experienced, in one of two basic physical settings. First, and most common in Edmonton, is the nightclub. There are approximately 10 clubs in Edmonton that cater specifically to electronic dance music fans, while approximately a half-dozen larger, more pop-oriented clubs also play certain kinds of electronic music. There are also innumerable smaller bars and clubs around Edmonton that feature some electronic dance music to a lesser extent, usually dance mixes of other pop tunes, or certain dance tracks that have become radio hits. Compared to dance clubs, these smaller bars tend to have little or no room for dancing, more tables and chairs, less sophisticated light systems, and often no turntables. These various clubs occasionally host events that attract the 'dance crowd,' but for the most part cater to a more general audience.

The second type of dance environment is the party, often called a rave. Parties are organized outside the typical club environment, occasionally in club spaces 'made up' for the event, though usually in community halls, warehouses, fields, or, as I described earlier, in large arena spaces. These spaces are decorated with elaborate

screens and lights, sometimes featuring giant inflatables[1], ice sculptures, fire dancers, or other extravagant festival decorations.

A cross between these two types of dance spaces occurs at "club nights," when a production company promotes and hosts particular DJs at a club, and will often charge a higher entrance fee for that particular event. This is the most common type of dance event in Edmonton. For legal and logistical reasons, dance events held outside clubs tend to be enormous undertakings for promoters who can make money by holding club nights without the trouble of finding a space, hiring extra security, obtaining permits, or dealing with the police, all problems routinely experience in putting on a large-scale party.

Studying Dance Music

While histories of dance music trace the roots of dance music to disco in New York, Chicago, and Detroit in the early to mid 1980's (Collins 1997, Reynolds 1996), the most direct dance music influences on Edmonton, as with most Canadian cities, grow out of the British "rave"" phenomenon of the late 1980's and early 1990's (Silcott 2000). Raves were, and continue to be, all-night dance music experiences held in warehouses, fields, halls, or nightclubs. In the early 1990's, people in Edmonton started organizing raves in community halls and nightclubs, similar to those in Britain, though relatively smaller. Since the advent of raves, and due largely to restrictive legislation both in Britain and later in North America, dance events have

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[1] Boxing rings, jumping rooms, giant balloon figures etc., created from enormous balloon structures participants can often jump on or in.

moved, for the most part, into nightclubs, venues designed for all-night dancing with specific licensing and restrictions.

Dance music in Edmonton has never been studied. The growing (English) academic work in the area of dance and club cultures has focused primarily on the northeast States and Europe, particularly in Britain, with some Canadian work focusing primarily on Toronto and Montreal. Building largely on subcultural theory, work from both Britain and North America has focused on types of dance cultures.

Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson examine the social and political aspects of dance music and culture in Britain in *Discographies: Dance Music, Culture and the Politics of Sound* (1999). In it, covering topics ranging from technology, the body, gender, and drug use, to resistance, they "respond… to some of the effects which dance culture has generated over the last twenty years" (1999, viii). While very strong theoretically, their arguments never really feel connected to the general dance subculture they invoke, leaving the reader wondering, to some extent, what that subculture is.

Drawing on her own ethnographic work, Sarah Thornton, in *Club Cultures: Music Media and Subcultural Capital* (1998), examines how a 'clubber and raver' subculture has its own hierarchies of subcultural capital, a notion she borrows from Bourdieu. Members of a subculture, or subcultures paradoxically set themselves in opposition to a larger mainstream, defining themselves against elitist or mainstream

ideals, while constructing their own hierarchies and elitisms within their own subculture's structures. Those subcultures, what she terms "club cultures" are "'*ad hoc*' communities with fluid boundaries which may come together and dissolve in a single summer or endure for a few years" (1996, 3). Somewhat problematic in her book is her awkward relationship with the club cultures she explores. A consistent sense of having to "work" (academically observe) while others "'lose [themselves]' and 'let the rhythm take control'" (1996,2) pervades her book. If those subcultures are based essentially on tastes (1996,3), which she can only stand outside of as an academic, she raises the problem that academic work is somehow separate from taste. The very fluidity of the cultural boundaries she explores works in tension with her sense of not entirely belonging to those cultures, opening up the possibility that the subcultures she studied were varied 'subcultures' of style, age, or nationality, not general, definable "club cultures" based on a particular club experience, of which she clearly took part.

Other academic work, less ethnographically specific, tends to focus on the positive possibilities for resistance, community and identity formation in rave cultures. Birgit Richard and Heinz Kruger discuss the techno/dance movement in Germany, specifically the Love Parade in Berlin, in "Ravers' Paradise? German Youth Cultures in the 1900s" (1998). Typical of many articles about dance cultures (see also Hutson 1999), I find their work slightly too optimistic in views toward ecstasy and the positive, open cultural spaces at raves and clubs. These types of articles often exhibit the position of an academic who does not have a lot of experience with ecstasy, other

drugs, or general dance music culture. Reynolds and Silcott both mention 'phases' of ecstasy cultures: the initial honeymoon period of a year or two, and then a gradual 'descent' into other drug use, harsher cultural environments, and disillusionment. In my mind, many academic articles about dance music sit in a honeymoon phase of ecstasy and the rave and club scene, and never sufficiently address either the mundane 'let's get stoned and go dancing, then maybe get laid' world of many dancers (see Ashurst 2000), or the simple fact that there are, as Thornton explores, mainstreams, subcultures, cultural divisions, 'insiders' and 'outsiders' to any dance scene.

In "Power Play and Party Politics," Daniel Martin offers a slightly more complex, yet similarly optimistic perspective on politics in rave culture. He challenges us to rethink the division between "symbolic" and "real" in the context of resistance, arguing rave "undermines traditional notions of the creation, performance, and dissemination of music" (1999, 92). Drawing on Foucault, he suggests we broaden our notion of politics, ultimately saying "rave culture may prove to be one of the most dynamic political movements of recent years" (1999, 96).

In *Clubbing: Dancing, Ecstasy, and Vitality*, Ben Malbon examines how the act of clubbing is a social practice, and how that practice is tied to play, "consumption and consuming, and the sociality and perfomativity which arise out of a concern with processes of identity formation and amendment (1999, 3)." Quoting eighteen ethnographic informants extensively, each of whom receive a biographical

introduction, Malbon is interested in the experience of clubbing as it has to do with other social/cultural practices, focusing specifically on London and the surrounding area. In defining a culture of clubbers, Malbon is most interested in what he "perceived as the largest *general* group of clubbers" (1999, 32). That "general group" is comprised of people who answered advertisements he took out in British dance magazines, similarly problematic to the fluid groups Thornton discusses.

Perhaps most successfully situated within a specific cultural group, Kai Fikentscher, in '*You Better Work*': *Underground Dance Music in New York City*, very explicitly positions himself in "the post-disco underground, an environment that began to take shape in New York City more than a quarter of a century ago (2000, x)." Specifically examining the New York underground dance music world (UDM), he is primarily interested in how music and dance fit into concepts of subculture and marginality, particularly with the gay black and Latino scene of the New York.

These various dance subcultures, each defined differently, each comprised of different people, all share a historical timeline, artists, music, and drugs. A glance through their discographies not only shows many of the same categories of music (house, acid house, trance, techno, jungle) but many of the same tracks share similar 'top 10' positions among genre and track listings. Music and DJs whom Fikentscher discusses in the context of UDM appear in Reynold's story of the rave scene in Britain, and many of those DJs and music also pass through Edmonton. This highlights a problem in examining these communities as music communities: if those

communities are formed around a particular music or activity, experiences shared among those communities, why are those communities so varied and (thus) so often difficult to define?

This shared aspect of dance music is also reflected in the vast popular literature on dance music as well, both in print and online. Several trade magazines and fanzines such as DJMag or Mixmag, and hosts of other music magazines such as Spin or Revolution carry extensive and often multimedia articles about and for dance culture. Web sites such as Hypperreal.org and Dancesafe.org both offer message boards full of accounts of experiences while dancing or listening to music, as well as extensive reference sections on the music and drugs of dance cultures. Most record labels and DJs have web pages, many dancers have web pages, and there is a host of information available online on the music, the drugs, and the fashions of the dance world from different organizations. There are also chat rooms and message boards dedicated to kinds of dance music or specific dance communities. DJ homepages discuss types of music, give biographies of musicians, and samples of music. Ashurst (2000) and Welsh (1997) are typical examples of stories that have grown out of dance cultures. While fictional, these kinds of stories are, as Simon Reynolds describes, part of a body of literature of "thinly disguised drug memoirs" (1999, 9); in other words, fictional accounts of a typical night out for many dancers.

This shared experience, or set of shared experiences, found throughout both popular and 'academic' writing, is the focus for my study. In most dance cultures, regardless

of divisions between sub genres of dance music, the music is created and performed the same way (vinyl, turntables, and amplification system), uses similar electronic sounds, is often performed in similar spaces (dance clubs), and at similar times (late night until morning). To reposition the focus from what communities are formed, or how subcultures may form around music, I turn to the personal music experience shared by almost all dance cultures.

To delve into "music experience" as a workable subject, I position myself between the relatively small world of music analysis in popular music, and the much broader world of ethnomusicology. Often, music analysis in popular music follows many of the same musical categories as western art music studies, namely tonality and word structure. Typical of this type of work, David Brackett, in an article on James Brown's 'Suberbad,' focuses on African-American linguistic characteristics in a song by James Brown. Using both lyrical (text) and traditional tonal analysis, he introduces the notion of cell – a short musical fragment, to connect the song with cultural concepts related to African American tradition and culture (1992). Richard Middleton, in "Popular Music and Musicology: Bridging the Gap" (1993), moves away from those same explicit categories with his introduction of the notion of gesture. In analyzing two songs by Madonna and Bryan Adams, he introduces "kinetic aspects" of music, as opposed to the traditional "cognitive aspects" previously privileged in music analysis. His connection between gestures and music, or what happens and the music that makes it happen, is unfortunately often too listener-specific, particularly without mention of who that person is or what

environment they are in. Reading various swirls and lines in graphs representing some aspect of the performance of the pieces, it is often difficult to understand exactly what the graphs represent beyond the author's own experience of those pieces. However, Middleton's suggestion that there is a need for something other than traditional notation of traditional categories (pitch and text) in studying music is important and informs the basic starting point for my chapter on sound in dance music. Adam Krims, noting the difficulty of discussing timbre in analysis (2000, 45), primarily uses rhythm as analytical 'material' in his analysis of rap music. As I discuss in my next chapter on sound, dance music is for the most part wordless, and categories of pitch and harmony quickly disintegrate in its timbral world. I thus focus largely on textures in my approach to the music of dance music, notating texture as a way to understanding 'the actual music': the sounds one hears.

That sound, however, is interestingly tied to specific performances. In histories of dance music, songs, called tracks, are often listed as pivotal, from Donna Summers' "I Feel Love" in the disco era to Second Phase's "Mentasm" in the history of gabba, a fast, Dutch dance music (see Fikentscher 1999, 27 and Reynolds 1996, 284). Specific tracks are also known in dance cultures through radio play; Darude's 2000 hit "Sandstorm" is an example of a track known worldwide and played in clubs, including in Edmonton, gaining much of its popularity through radio play. However, most dance music is experienced over the course of many hours, involving the manipulation and arrangement of tracks into "sets." Most dancers never hear the tracks they dance to outside of a club, and almost all dance tracks are disseminated

outside clubs only as parts of mixes, groupings of tracks by a DJ, recorded as one musical unit, sold on cassettes or CD's.

In studying dance music, I have discovered it is impossible to separate the music from the activity, an "aspect of culture and social life" (Seeger 1987, xiii). I have built my study on the idea that dance music is fundamentally an activity, not a written, spoken, or sung text or even a system of communication between artists and audience. A study of this kind necessarily requires an ethnographic dimension; there is no score for a night of music, virtually no visible communication between performers and audience, or even among audience members. Jeff Todd Titon, in "Knowing Fieldwork," suggests, "the world is not like a text to be read but like a musical performance to be experienced" (1997, 91). Dance music, I argue, is about experience, a very physical experience. John Chernoff states

> *The most important gap for the participant-observer, therefore, is not between what he sees and what is there, but between his experience and how he is going to communicate it.* (1979, 11)

Central to this statement is not only how to relate and experience, but also the very ownership of that discussed experience. As an examination of an experience, this thesis is fundamentally an ethnography (Clifford 1988, 25), and as such, is about *someone's* experience. The "dance experience" I ultimately explore is *my* experience, without an explicit tie to a more generally experienced "dance experience." I felt

there were two ways to address this problem. The first way, employed by Ben Malbon in *Clubbing* (2000), is to somehow sample texts from dancers through questions and interviews. Transcriptions of conversations with seventeen ethnographic informants gave him (arguably) a cross-section of Londoners who went clubbing. Similarly, Rob Walser distributed questionnaires to heavy metal enthusiasts for his research in that community (1993, 27). The resulting texts from this method become ethnographic material to work with. A second approach is an approach taken up by musicologists who have studied 'actual music,' and that is to start with the poetics, or textual structure, of the music, developing theory from sounds (see Krims 2000, also Brackett 1992).

I have tried, in the confines of a project this size, to combine the two approaches, following a model similar to Regula Qureshi (1995), who approaches Qawwali performance first as something heard, before examining the performance process. I approach an experience, something personal, something someone does, from the elements of that experience which can be explored as physical characteristics. I ground the very elusive concept of experience by taking the most tangible aspects of it, its sounds, sights, and feelings, as an approach to understanding what a dance experience is.

In working with the physical aspects of an experience, I not only address the issue of ownership in that experience, I also create a way to translate the experience to text. Using transcription and photographs, and drawing on theory of kinesthesia (Sklar

2000), I ground an experience in workable text frameworks. In this way, my thesis is a study of how meaning is shaped as physical experience.

My Ethnographic World: Positioning Myself.

My fieldwork began in 1997 with a visit to several dance clubs in Edmonton to gain ideas for a term paper in ethnographic field methods. Not previously aware of the dynamic world of dance culture, I was amazed by the sight of young dancers clutching bottles of water, dancing with eyes closed at 3 am, completely and visibly involved with the music. Two years later, I decided to focus my thesis research on that dance music, not having visited clubs much since that first experience, still confused by the multitude of genres and its overwhelming style and culture. Now, two years after that, I feel I am just starting to have something to say.

My first paper on dance music was about DJ's. A community easily categorized by their activity, I found myself using theoretical models of community and performance to analyze how they acted as performers. In delving further into dance music, I became more and more interested in the sounds of dance music, and what I saw as a completely radical musical experience, with 'audience members' dancing in what appeared to be their own worlds, listening to music that did not stop for hours, in spaces that consistently had a specific dance 'look.' This experience seemed to fit theories of community much more awkwardly. Without a substantial series of surveys, it was relatively impossible to accurately determine average age, gender, or

nationality, but from countless informal discussions with friends and DJs, and my own notes and observations, I would suggest most dancers at most events tend to be relatively representative of middle-class, young Edmontonians: a mix of white, black, and Asian, male and female, gay and straight. In general, men outnumber women.

An ethnographic domain simplistically categorized not by ethnicity or geographical location so much as type of consumer (anyone can be a raver, just go buy a ticket…), my fieldwork often positioned me in a strange place that straddled being an outside academic and being just as much an informant as the people I met. In the short time I've begun to learn about dance music, I have not only danced at clubs, listened to music, and talked with dancers and DJs, I've also found myself sought out as an "expert" for a newspaper article on raves. I guest lectured a university class, and organized a Halloween party involving 6 DJs, two full sound systems, and approximately 50 people in a residential house. My varied roles are smaller in scale yet similarly complex as those explored by ethnographers from Malinowski in *Diary in a Strict Sense of the Term*, to Chernoff in *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (Chernoff 1979, 1-23), Gage Averill (Averill 1997, xv-xxi), and problematized by Kisliuk (1997) and Beaudry (1997); however, my position(s) within the Edmonton dance scene make few explicit appearances in this thesis. For the most part, my role in the dance scene in Edmonton has been that of a typical dancer. Throughout my research, I attended most dance clubs in Edmonton; I danced with and observed dancers at virtually every party, and read and wrote on the message boards. I have abysmal DJ'ing skills and listen to hours and hours of dance music whenever I get the

chance. I have interviewed several prominent DJs in Edmonton, some out of town DJs, as well as dancers, 'experiencers,' like myself, and have had countless conversations about dance music with people I've met once or known for years. In the three years dance music has been part of my life, I have never encountered a specific "dance community" as such, with an identity or ideals that extended beyond dancing and vague notions of peace, acceptance, and fun.

This thesis is ultimately about my experience with a type of music, space, chemical, and motion. It is a way to understand a dance community not so much as a 'traditional' subculture, but as a collection of shared, individual experiences.

Chapter 2 - Sound

Midnight, I was tired, Kevy and I were at Fargos[2], and we had to make the usual difficult decision: go out dancing or head home? Roland the Bastard was playing techno at Trade[3], the pre-party for a party tomorrow, so we went out, as usual. Great night, after all. We danced like mad. I love Trade. Sixteen speakers, four on each side, hang from the ceiling, pointing in toward the center of the dance floor. Two speaker towers are on either side of the DJ booth. The most satisfying sound system in Edmonton, the only one I think matches the size of the space. You can talk to the person next to you on the dance floor, but still feel the music shake your body. Nice. Now I'm tired. Time for bed. (Personal Notes Jan 26, 2001)

Dance music is sound music; it is *about* sound. Every dance music lover I have spoken with agrees with me. Every music lover I have discussed this with also points out all music is sound. Taking that even a step further, Jaques Attali, discussing music as the organization of noise, argues, "it is sounds and their arrangements that fashion societies" (1985, 6). Arguing sound is at the heart of power relations, he sees Western History as a Sound History. If all music is an organization of sound, an organization intricately woven into the fabric of power relations, the theoretical question at the heart of meaning in music becomes a question of how the sounds of music relate to the meanings created in and by music.

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[2] A sports bar near where I live.
[3] A dance club, now closed, in downtown Edmonton.

As I suggested in chapter 1, music theories often engage pitch (harmony), rhythm, and text in fashioning patterns of meaning. Meaning in music is a product of how tones, rhythms, and texts relate, for example, to each other (Longhurst 1995), to social groups (Brackett 1992, Krims 2000), or types of communication (Cook 1994). Lawrence Grossberg addresses this latter type of favoring by introducing the notion of gesture. William Washabaugh addresses the same issue in a different way in "The Flamenco Body," where he argues that the meaning in certain *cante* performances lies in how dancers use their bodies when performing, not in the texts or harmonies of the songs they sing. In this chapter, I suggest texture is key to understanding meaning in dance music. Just as melody and rhythm are traditionally examined to locate meaning in western music, I examine textures to locate meaning in dance music. In this way, I shift the emphasis onto sound, an aspect of all music, and argue that sound, and not the melody or the rhythm, offer ways to construct meaning in dance music.

"Dance music is sound music" is a statement about the role of timbre. Meaning is created by how sounds are manipulated, not in pitch or rhythm, but through timbre, through their actual sounds. These "actual sounds" are a physical element in music, and so the experience of timbre is thus a physical experience. Throughout this chapter, I look to this sonic aspect of dance music to locate meaning in what I argue is a type of physical experience.

The Instrument

The sound one encounters in any dance environment is usually produced by the same instrument - two turntables, a mixer, an amplification system, and speakers. The two turntables and mixer are placed on a table or counter, with the turntables generally on some sort of motion-absorbing surface such as foam rubber to avoid making the needle 'skip' during the tracks. The DJ stands behind the tables, wearing a set of headphones that are plugged into the mixer, enabling him or her to hear one track while the other is playing over the speakers. The turntables change speeds according to the position of a lever on each of them, enabling the DJ to play the record at the speed he or she chooses. Using the aDJustable speed and the ability to hear one track while the other plays, the DJ is able to 'match beats,' or synchronize the beats of the records, creating a constant rhythm from one track to the next.

The speaker system usually consists of at least two speaker towers - a series of speakers stacked on top of each other, and often in a nightclub there are at least four or six speakers suspended from the ceiling surrounding the dance floor. Generally, the music is played at just below maximum volume for the sound system, with the lower frequencies played loudest. One can thus feel as well as hear the music, a point I develop later this chapter.

The Music

Genre

> *For genre definitions, give up looking for accurate prose descriptions. It is not easy to describe music that is mainly drums and bass, and when people try, they usually get it wrong, or don't have the musicological vocabulary to really make the reader understand what something *sounds* like. Instead, try listening to examples where DJs have identified (with maybe 80% accuracy) the styles they play.* (Mike Brown, 2001)

Genre descriptions of dance music almost always fall into heavily descriptive prose that give almost no meaning to a reader. ADJectives like "funky, wicked, twisted, futuristic, soulful, or psychedelic" end up cluttering a typical definition of a sound, only to be combined with just a confusing breakdown of rhythm and tempo, with terms such as "breaks" discussed with ranges of beats per minute. This is further complicated by different understandings of genres, and the constant development of new genres, among music fans, DJs and producers, who often come up with their own genre names and descriptions, or who combine aDJectives with more standard genre names. The owners of "Arrival," a large, after hours nightclub opened in Edmonton in early March 2001, posted a message on the E-town (Edmonton) Rave Page message board two days before they opened. In it they list some of the genres their resident DJs will perform:

MUSIC: 1st, Thanks to all the DJs that have approached us to play the venue! Our list is 45 strong and growing! This allows for the best mix of styles possible: House, funky house, Disco, hard House, Nu-Nrg, Dark Energy, Funky Hard House, French Disco, techno, trance and if I have it my way soon enough acid techno… (etownravepage.com 2001)

Their list of eleven genres, or styles, covers only the material they will play at their club, using one sound system, two nights a week. Two of the genres are defined simply by adding the word "funky" to "house" and "hard house," respectively, differences that most dancers would not necessarily be able to distinguish. This kind of breakdown into genres defined by a 'sub-type' of genre or sub-genre is common, particularly with DJs defining their particular style. The same posting lists the act for the opening night:

Headliner of the evening --> From LA, the NU-NRG, DARK ENERGY, TRANCE & Hard House Guru himself: Mike Downey aka Knockem'Downey. (etownravepage.com 2001)

Four genres are listed for a DJ who might play a 2 or 3 hour set. This type of overly precise genre definition is balanced by some DJs who prefer not to think of dance music in so many genres at all. Graham Lock, an Edmonton DJ, described his attitude toward genre definitions:

Personally, as far as putting labels on dance music, it gets far too confusing. It's easier from a marketing point of view, or a selling point of view to say 'well this is this, so that's what you want to buy,' but as far as a new person trying to absorb it, it's really confusing, because there are umpteen different genres. I just call it all house music. That's it. So whether it's trance, or techno, or whatever you want, it's all house music because that's where it all came from, which came from a combination of funk, latin and disco. (Lock 2000)

This 'simplifying' quote not only sheds an interesting light on the previous quotes, both by a club advertising (selling) their DJs, but also is typical of some of the older[4] DJs with whom I have spoken. In conversation, many older DJs will tend to focus on whether the music "makes people want to dance" or not, or whether it's 'good' or 'bad,' shying away from the multitude of constantly changing, ever dividing sub-sub-genres of dance music. I hesitate to argue for any particular significance to this, but it has been consistent enough in my experience that I feel it represents a pattern worth a future study on genre and age. That being said, and despite the range of kinds of dance genres and ways of thinking of them, within the dance community there are a multitude of generally recognized genres in dance music.

The difficulty in providing a basic overview of dance genres lies in finding a place somewhere between listing the hundreds of genres based on subtle differences, and lumping everything together. Generally, there are very basic genre distinctions made

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[4] "Older" in this case meaning mid to late twenties and beyond.

between several types of music divided by speed of beat, and several distinctions made between kinds of sounds. My description below is an attempt to give a very basic introduction to some of the main kinds of music played in Edmonton dance clubs. I will necessarily leave out some genres, and interpret some in ways other people would differ; even within Edmonton dance communities; however, this table will hopefully give some sense of not only the main kinds of music one might find in a dance club, but more importantly, how genre divisions in dance music are made. This genre description is a snapshot of the main genres one currently hears in Edmonton.

NAME/GENRE	TIMBRE/KIND OF SOUND	SPEED OF BEAT	KIND OF BEAT
Downtempo (refers more generally to slower music)	Slow house, Often more sustained sounds	Slower – under 100 BPM[5]	Steady 4/4, sometimes hip hop-style syncopations
House	Most closely related to Disco sounds, Samples from soul, funk, Often with sung or spoken words mentioning dance, groove, and body.	Up to 130 BPM	Steady 4/4
Trance	Sustained sounds, Melodic lines, Synthesized strings, Often with sung or spoken words mentioning beauty, life, nature, and love.	Up to 145 BPM	Steady 4/4
Techno	Intentionally 'computerized' sounds, Not melodic	Up to 150 BPM	Steady 4/4
Hard House	Similar to house, but faster, with a more driven feel	Up to 150-160 BPM	Steady 4/4
Happy Hardcore	Much faster, again, similar to house, Sometimes with MC[6]	Up to and over 180 BPM	Steady 4/4
Drum and Bass/Jungle	Syncopated beats, Sometimes with MC[7], Usually not melodic.	Ranges, depends on which beats one counts, the quarter note of hip hop as fast as 200 BPM	Sycopated 4/4 of Hip hop, but over twice as fast

Figure 1 – Genres in Dance Music

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[5] "BPM" stands for "beats per minute." It is the standard measure of tempo in dance music.
[6] "Master of Ceremonies," a rapper similar to those in hip hop music.
[7] There are also occasionally singers (Edmonton's Sync and Lady J being one example) who sing 'over' jungle tracks played by a DJ.

I have left out a few relatively prominent genres including Garage, a kind of house; big beat, a kind of syncopated dance music, slower than jungle; various kinds of 'energy' genres (high NRG, Nu NRG…), which are faster European genres; Gabber, another fast Dutch genre, and others. Most of these other genres are not terribly prominent in the Edmonton area, a scene dominated by trance, house, techno, and hard house.

There are also large subdivisions of genre that cross the above genre divisions, based on specific synthesizer sounds. Probably the biggest of these categories is 'acid' music. "Acid" (a term with unclear origins) refers to a specific electronic sound, originally from the Roland 303 bass guitar synthesizer, an electronic instrument that makes a guitar sound. That guitar sound, when part of a house, trance or techno track, makes those tracks 'acid' tracks. "Acid house" and "acid techno" have become entire genres some DJs specifically align themselves with.[8]

The above chart is approximate in its description of tempo. There are two reasons for this. First, genres simply overlap in tempo range – a slow trance track could be slower than a fast house track. Similarly, some types of techno are no faster than an average house track, but have a specific 'computerized' sound that makes them techno. Second, DJs are able to play each track within a range of speeds (owing to the aDJustable speed of the turntables). Depending on the crowd, the DJ's mood, the kinds of other tracks being played, or other variables in a night's performance, a DJ will play a track or a set at a certain speed or range of speeds. Thus, a trance track

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[8] For example, Edmonton DJ Tryptomene, whose set I analyze later this chapter, is an acid techno DJ.

pressed on vinyl to be played with 135 BPM at 45 rpm[9] might be played as slow as

120 BPM or as fast as 150 BPM. Naturally, music played at such varied speeds also

has varying timbres according to the speed at which it is played. This variability

gives a fluidity to the lines drawn between genres, making it often not only difficult to

describe exactly which genre is which, but also opens the door to many of the new

genre names that constantly enter the dance-world's vocabulary, some examples of

which I presented at the beginning of this chapter (funky dark house, etc.).

Expanding the notion of genre.

Simon Frith, in a chapter on genre in his book *Performing Rites* (1996), discusses

genre as a type of social practice. Opening the chapter with a discussion of how

genre is used to market music, a way to categorize music in a sales process, he argues

that music is categorized by type of consumer (sociologically), market function

(ideologically), and kinds of sounds, 'structure' of the music (musicologically).

These categories came to an interesting head in the example he gives surrounding the

licensing of British Radio 1, where lawmakers and the music industry defined genres

musicologically and sociologically respectively, and arrived at different genre

divisions. Having demonstrated the complexity of genre formation, he argues further:

> *Popular music genres are constructed-and must be understood-within a*
> *commercial/cultural process; they are not the result of detached academic*
> *analyses or formal musicological histories.* (1996, 89)

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[9] "Rotations per minute," the standard 33 and 45 of all record players, also shared in dance music.

Genres are tied up with processes of buying music, identifying with styles and subcultures, with ideologies. Simon Reynolds, in his book on the British rave scene, demonstrates how some dance genres can be, for instance, consumption practices:

> *There's music for clubs: sophisticated, adult-oriented sounds like house, garage, and the more purist, Detroit-affiliated forms of techno. There are hardcore sounds designed for one-shot raves and for clubs that cater to rave-style teenage bacchanalia as opposed to more "mature" nightclub behavior;: jungle, gabba, trance, happy hardcore. And finally, there's music for the home: album-oriented ambient techno and atmosphere electronica that appeals both to people who've grown tired of the rave lifestyle and to many who've never been into dance culture at all.* (1999, 8)

These three main categories are, for the most part, consumption practices, while the 'sub-genres' listed within each of Frith's three categories fall into more specifically musicological descriptions (house, trance, ambient…). This type of layering and intertwining of sociological and musicological genre rules is further developed by Frith. Using work by Franco Fabbri, he ultimately argues that there are sets of rules that govern how genres 'work.' Factors such as sound conventions, performing conventions, packaging conventions, and musical ideology all play a part in how genres are defined. He goes on to suggest there is meaning in popular music because "musicians, producers, and consumers are already ensnared in a web of genre expectation, (94)" and it is through genre that both performers and audience value the

music they make or listen to. Genre is not simply a musicological category, nor is it simply a type of consumer category or ideological stance; genre is a complex "web" of meanings among performers, producers, and consumers. Frith suggests:

> *It is genre rules which determine how musical forms are taken to convey meaning and value, which determine the aptness of different sorts of judgment, which determine the competence of different people to make assessments. It is through genres that we experience music and musical relations, that we bring together the aesthetic and the ethical.* (1996, 95)

Understanding genre as systems of meaning, ways to value, understand, and relate to music, I want to turn to dance music specifically. As I discussed in the first chapter, varied dance communities share the same genre definitions, 'top ten lists,' and histories: from the underground, largely homosexual dance world of New York, to the working-class world of outdoor raves in early 90's Britain, to the middle-class clubbing world of Edmonton. If we accept the argument that, as music consumers, we value music through genres and genre expectations, then there is something shared among these sociologically different, geographically separated cultural groups that goes beyond simply recognizing similar musicological divisions. They share a history, a way of defining genres musicologically, but also something at the level of experience. While working class Scottish teenagers might dance to happy hardcore (Reynolds 1996), Latino middle class professionals might dance to house (Fikentscher 2000), and middle class teenagers might dance to trance in Edmonton, I

argue there is something fundamentally similar to the way they all make and experience the music.

Dance music is experience music

Simon Reynolds, speaking as a music critic, discusses how dance music (which he terms "rave"), differs from rock:

> *Unlike rock music, rave isn't built around lyrics. For the critic this requires a shift of emphasis, so that you no longer ask what the music "means" but how it works. What is the affective charge of a certain kind of bass sound, of a particular rhythm? Rave music represents a fundamental break with rock, or at least with dominant English Lit and socialist realist paradigms of rock criticism, which focus on songs and storytelling. Where rock relates an experience (autobiographical or imaginary), rave constructs an experience. Bypassing interpretation, the listener is hurled into a vortex of heightened sensations, abstract emotions, and artificial energies.* (1999, 9)

While such a reading of both "rave" and rock is limited to a specific reading of both types of music, Reynolds' claim that "rave constructs an experience," instead of relating an experience from an artist to a listener, can be understood to suggest there is a fundamental shift in dance music toward a new kind of experience, an experience

more closely related to a participation in a 'dance music world' than communicating between an artist and audience.

This resonates with typical rhetoric surrounding much dance culture. In a recent posting on the "etown[10] rave page" message board, one of a couple of main message boards used by dancers in the Edmonton community, a user initiated a discussion on a term paper he was thinking of writing on raving. This provoked several responses leading to a more general discussion on rave as a subculture, with a response from one user who defined what raving was for him:

> The essence of rave to me:
>
> -escape YOUR daily grind in a fantastic experience.
>
> -dance INDIVIDUALLY on the dance floor, in YOUR own world.
>
> -often, pursue YOUR pleasure to the fullest, usually breaking the laws that restrict YOUR freedom for the (supposed ☺) good of the community.
>
> (2001)

He makes no mention of a message, an artist, a song, or even a community. The essence is to "escape", to "dance", to "pursue"; the point is pleasure, "YOUR" pleasure. This is not only a break with the notion of a meaningful message sung or played by an artist to an audience, it is a break with the notion of artist and audience communication all together. It is 'about' an experience.

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[10] A common nickname for Edmonton in the dance community.

However, this kind of rhetoric, common in discussions surrounding dance music, is contrasted by just as common rhetoric describing a communication between artist and audience. A message board on maxgraham.com, the website for successful (Canadian) trance DJ Max Graham, recently had a post reading:

> *Max couldn't make me dance...*

> *...because I was in a trance just watching, listening, & trying to define Mr. Graham.*

And later in that same message:

> *Max, I can't express in words what you gave me that night in Baton Rouge, La. I know I was just another sweaty face in the crowd but it felt like [you were] playing it all for me & I wanted every second of it!* (Jackson, 2001)

This reads exactly as any stereotypical fan to singer/songwriter comment. Jackson felt Max played for him specifically, a direct audience/artist relationship often explored in the realm of the lied (Gramit, 1995) or of other music (Raykoff 2000). His description 'blames' Max for being so good, so personal, Jackson could not even dance.

However, the apparent discrepancy between these two types of rhetoric dissolves when developing the notion put forth by Reynolds, that the dance experience is more about the experience than the explicit message 'told' by an artist. The essence, for Electroluxx, is about "YOUR pleasure." Jackson includes the DJ (Max) in his description of his experience – "I was in a trance just watching, listening, & trying to define Mr. Graham" – but it is still about an experience; he was in a trance, in his own world, watching and listening. Noteworthy in practically all dance music settings, one almost never sees couples dancing. There is rarely any form of explicit verbal or physical communication in the dance process, either on the part of the DJ, who mixes wearing headphones, usually looking down at his or her turntables, or the dancers, who, for the most part, dance facing the same direction, as I discuss in more detail in chapter four.[11] Dance music is thus about a type of individual experience; I posit that experience can be understood as a physical experience, though not necessarily in the physical act of dancing. Key to my argument is Jackson's claim he could not even dance. The physicality of dance music lies in its sounds.

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[11] As I discuss later, there is communication among dancers, particularly in the form of watching and often applauding other dancers, but my argument here is that unlike many dance forms, the dance process is not inherently a communicative process.

Dance music is sound music

Our bodies experience all sound physically. In a discussion on music and the body in their book *Discographies*, Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson compare sound waves to light waves, observing:

> *Music possesses a literally visceral quality, relying for its effects not just on the neural registration of light waves but on the resonance of sound waves throughout the organs and body tissues.* (1999, 46)

Comparing music to visual media, they suggest music is singularly physical because our bodies are actually moved, vibrated by it. This is especially true of dance music. Earlier in this chapter, when talking about the instruments used to play dance music, I noted that dance music is generally played at close to maximum volume level. Fikentscher notes the high volume levels at which dance music is played, and asks:

> *What is the point of playing at a high volume? [DJ] David DePino argues that a song 'comes to life' only in this way. At underground dance venues, the dynamic level of the music establishes the latter's absolute priority over other acoustic phenomena: conversation, handclapping, footstomping, yelling, whistling. All these are overshadowed by the volume of the music.* (1999, 85)

For Fikentscher, the volume of the music gives it a prominence and power over all the other sound in a club. I argue the loud volume also highlights sound as the most important feature of the music. It is not a song's message, or the stage presence of a performer that necessarily gives the music prominence over other sounds, it is sheer volume of sound, it is sound itself. The dance music experience becomes a sound experience.

However, sound itself does not happen in a cultural vacuum. In the same chapter, Gilbert and Pearson note:

> *Our experience of our bodies is always culturally determined; the very way we stand and sit varies from culture to culture. Similarly, it is impossible to speak of music simply affecting our bodies 'directly' since the ways in which we respond to certain sounds are always culturally encoded.* (1999, 48)

The very sound of the dance music, the physicality of it, is still "culturally encoded," and, I argue, still part of the "web of genre expectations" that give meaning to popular music. In dance music, sound is what gives meaning to those genre expectations. In *Running with the Devil*, Rob Walser argues for the importance of the discursive musical analysis in popular music. He suggests lyric and score-based analysis have been given too much priority in studying popular music, often to the neglect of "the

music itself"(41). He draws on timbre as one of the elements, also including tonality and volume, that make up meaning within heavy metal music, and suggests:

> *Lyrics, like costumes and performers' physical motions, help direct and inflect the interpretation of the meanings that are most powerfully delivered, those suggested by the music.* (1993, 41)

The meanings told by lyrics are "most powerfully delivered" by the music, by the sounds. In dance music, there are no lyrics, no scores, and the meanings are "directed" and "inflected" by timbre, by sound quality.

Earlier, I suggested the primary defining factors in musicological definitions of dance music lay in timbre and tempo. Those elements are elements of music that are experienced viscerally; they are the sound of the music, arguably the "music itself." In this way, dance music is about sound, meaning is derived from a sound experience. Reynolds' claim that 'rave creates an experience' is really about a sound experience. All 'webs of meaning' surrounding dance music are thus fundamentally tied to the actual sound of dance music, tied to the physical experience of not only hearing, but really feeling a kind of sound.

I will examine two basic formal units in the formation of a dance music experience: the track and the set. Beginning with a look at the structure of a track, and

developing that into an examination of the structure of a set, I will explore further how sound lies at the heart of the dance experience.

Musical Form in Dance Music

Track - "Thrust 1"

Dance music is composed of tracks, single 'songs' pressed onto one side of a vinyl record. Most dance tracks are built on 4-beat patterns, generally grouped into larger groups of four. If measures were used, the basic unit would be a four-measure phrase of 4/4 measures – or, in the vocabulary of dance music producers, 16 beat sections or loops. Those phrases are worked into one or a series of 'buildups' and 'breakdowns' during a track. A buildup is a building up of texture, often including rhythmic texture, to a climax of some sort. A breakdown is a dropping out of musical textures to a point where either a new buildup begins, or to the end of the track. Interestingly, while these two terms are common in most discussion within the dance community, particularly among DJs, most DJs have had slightly different responses when I have asked what a breakdown was. Generally, all agree it involves a reduction in textures, though some use the term to describe a longer section of a trance track that is primarily melodic, not rhythmic, and some use it to describe the moment when textures drop out before a buildup, and some use it to describe any section when there is a general thinning out of texture. I thus avoid using the term extensively in my discussion, preferring to work more closely with the concept of buildup. There is often one main buildup, often two, in a track that lasts either around six or around ten minutes (depending if the track is pressed as a 33 or 45, both equally common).

Another important structural feature of dance tracks is the first and last sections of each track, both usually lasting about 1 minute, usually with little more than the drums and bass sounds, designed to make mixing in the track to the current piece and mixing the track out easier.

As noted, the most fundamental structural feature of this music is the use and combination of 16-beat patterns. Musical interest in these patterns is created using textures . In comparison with a piano sonata, one could argue instead of manipulating tonality to create interest within a relatively static piano timbre, dance music manipulates timber to create interest in a relatively static tonal and rhythmic environment. Sounds are introduced and layered, timbres are manipulated, all within and using that 16-beat structure. The variety of sounds and the ways patterns are used help define a piece's genre, but virtually every genre makes use of constant 16-beat patterns to create series of buildups and break-downs in a track.

I now turn to the first four minutes of a piece demonstrating a very basic, typical track structure. British DJ, producer, and remixer Tim Ratcliffe, who goes by the DJ and producer name "Natious," released the track "Thrust 1",[12] on Bluestone records. This piece, which demonstrates some of the basic features of a typical trance track, is featured on the accompanying CD. I chose this piece for two reasons. First, it very clearly illustrates two main buildups as structural characteristics of a track. Second, it does so with typically 'trance-sounding' textures, without much of the more complicating melodic and harmonic features of many trance tracks. The selection,

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[12] Side B of the record is entitled "Thrust 2"

slightly less than half of the track, lasting from the beginning to the end of the first

buildup, is transcribed in Figure 4.

The transcription appears in 16-beat loops according to the basic loop pattern of most

of the sounds used. I divided each of those 16-beat sections into four, making a quasi

4-quarter note 'measure' composing the basic unit of the piece. I will refer to these

units as measures throughout my discussion of the piece, and have numbered them in

the transcription. Each sound, whether possessing a pitch or simply a percussive

sound, is given a number between 1 and 14, and is listed as it enters the piece. The

first measure of each sound is notated according to the rhythmic structure it (more or

less) adheres to. After that first measure, a single horizontal line represents an

approximate[13] repeat of that pattern. Thus, in the opening of the piece, one distinct

sound is illustrated by the following:
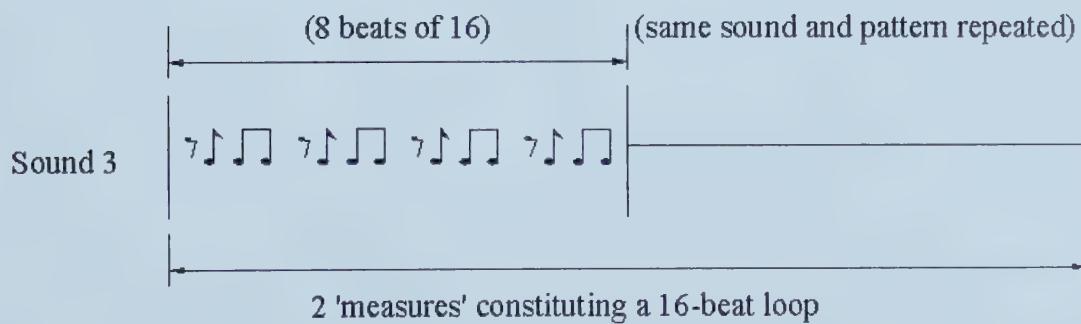
Figure 2 – "Thrust 1": Sound 3

---

[13] I qualify those statements to accommodate slight variations in rhythm and sound used in certain passages to add additional interest, or variations that are 'hidden' in a louder or more prominent texture.

The sounds are numbered according to entry, not according to pitch, and they are placed vertically in relation to each other approximately according to the pitch. I have tried to keep most of the percussion and bass lines in the lower half of the vertical space, but am most interested in the number of sounds that are used at one time. At the beginning of each line, I mark or remark each sound's rhythmic pattern. The only sounds that do not adhere to the above methodology are, for lack of a better term, 'swooshy' sounds. These sounds, sustained whispers and wind-like sounds, are defining trance sounds and give a linear dimension to the track. I have marked these sounds with curved lines, indicating a difference in meter and sound quality with the other track sounds. The lines generally curve up with a rise in pitch, or with a fading out of the lower frequencies of the sound:

"Swooshy" sound, starting
shortly after the first beat,
then fading.
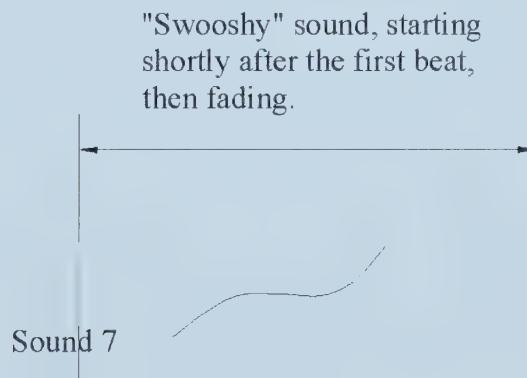
Sound 7

Figure 3 – "Thrust 1": Sound 7

At the end of the selection, sound 7 becomes most prominent (painfully so on a large sound system) and I have indicated this by a widening of the line representing it.

Section 1 - Opening

Section 2 - Establishing rhythm and textures

Opening of "thrust 1"

Figure 4 - "Thrust 1"
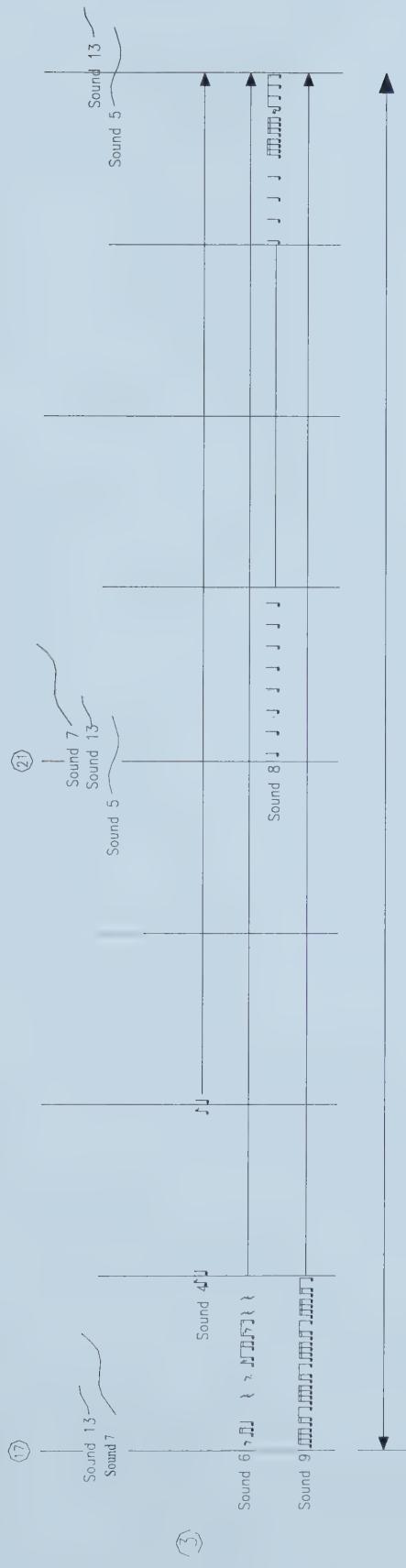
Section 2 - First Textural build-up
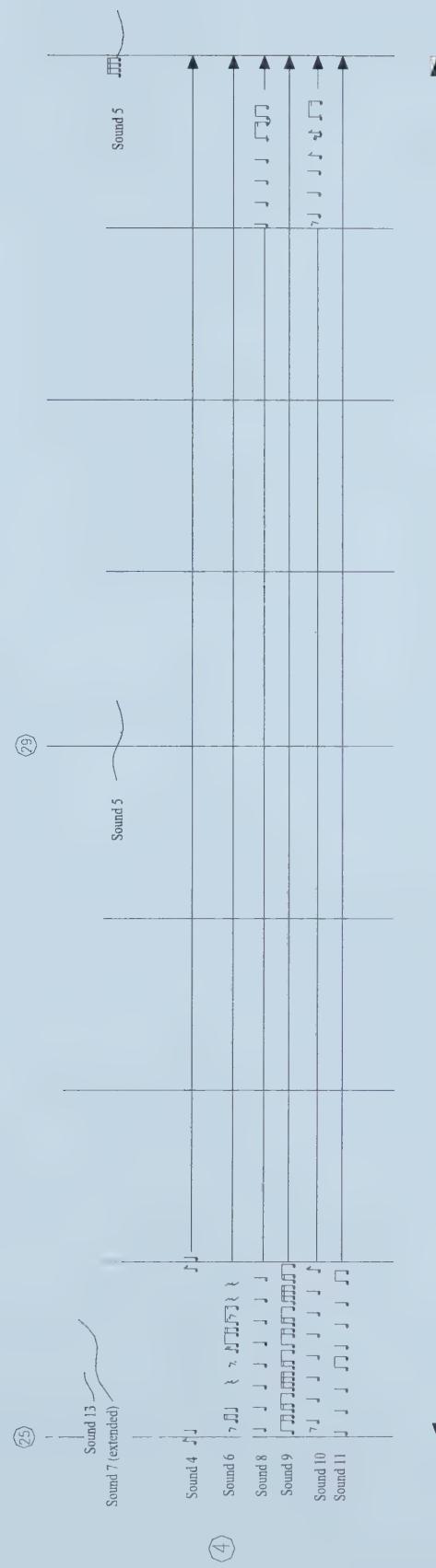
Section 2 - First Textura Build-up Continued

"thrust 1" Continued
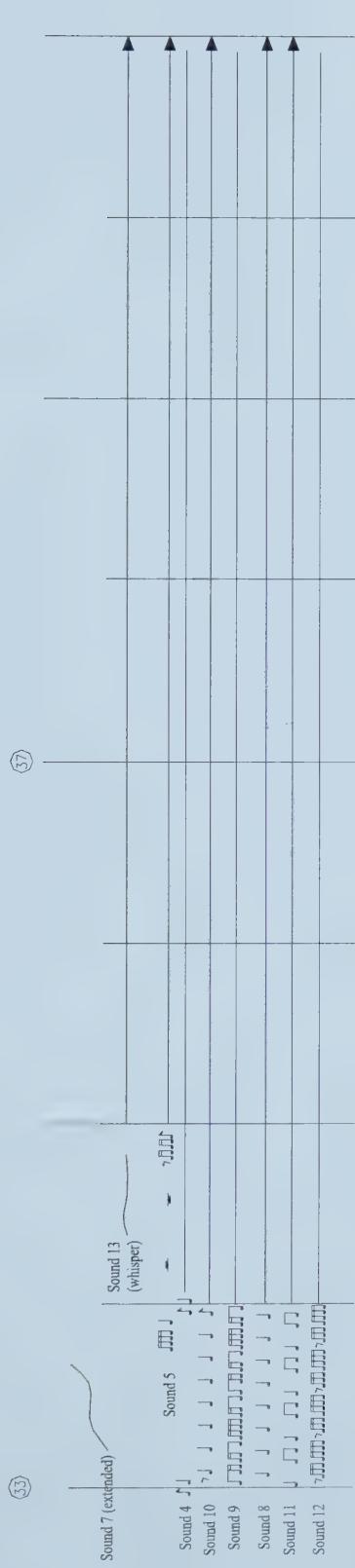
Section 2 - First Textura Build-up Continued
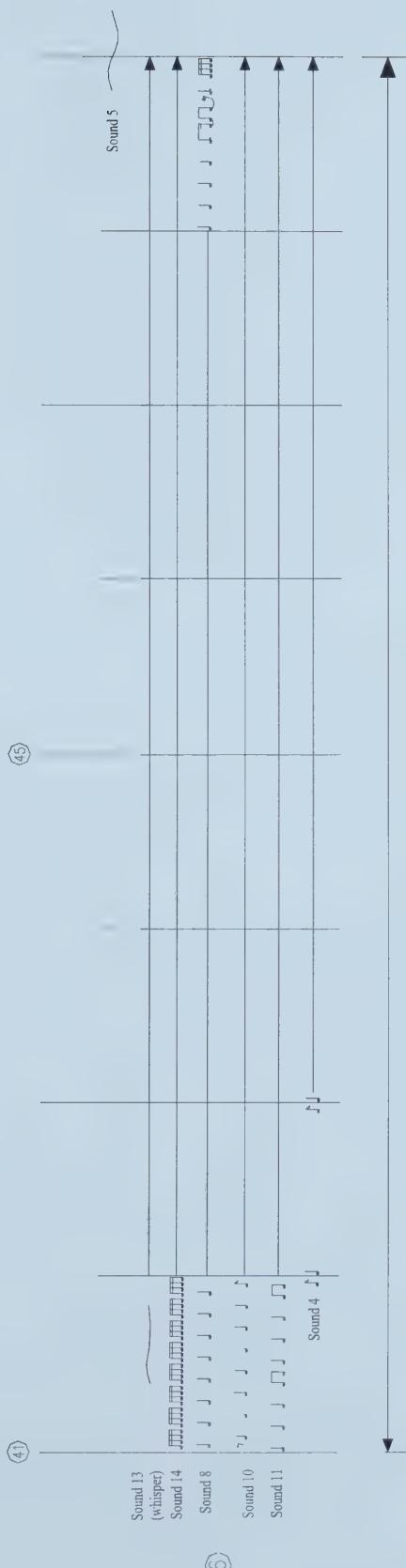
Section 2 - Second, Shorter Textural Build-up

"thrust 1" Continued

Section 3 - Breakdown and Major Build - up
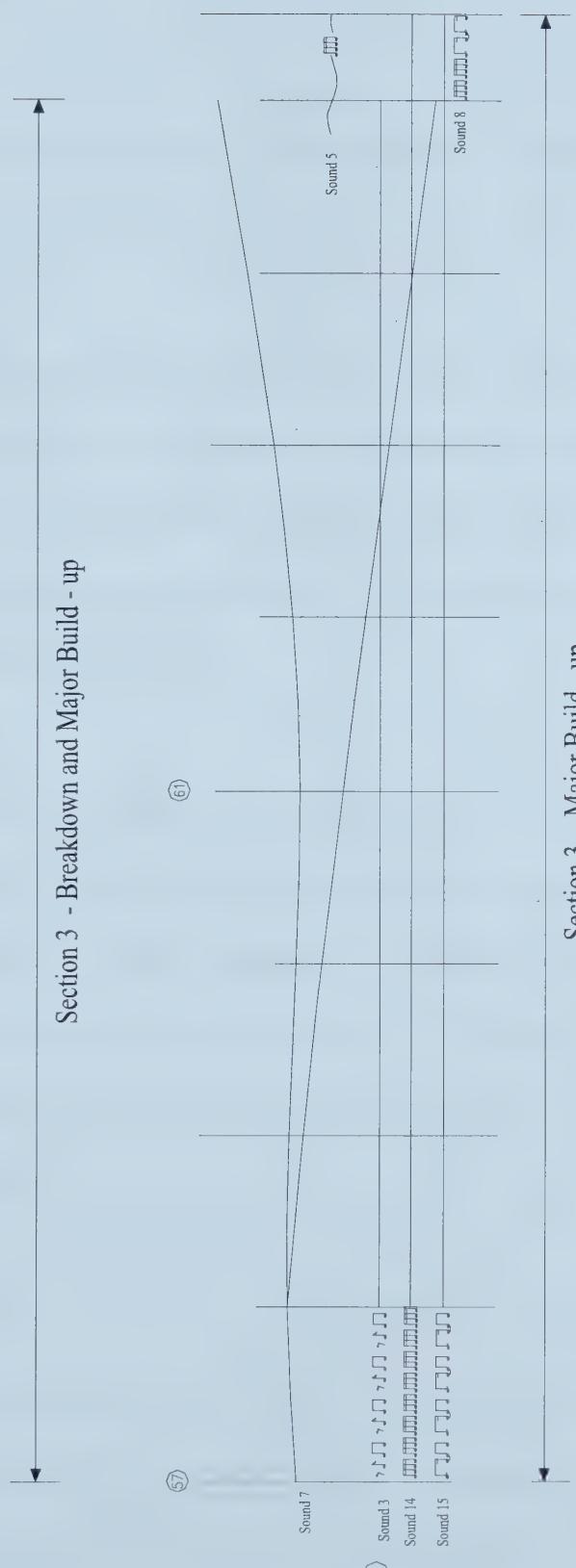
Section 3 - Major Build - up

"thrust 1" - End of First Section

I identify 3 major sections: the lead in, the first, minor textural buildup, and the major buildup.[14]

Lead in: This section lasts 8 measures. In this time the primary textures establish the 16-beat pattern and kind of 'feel' to the track. In the fifth measure, two new sounds are introduced, sounds 5 and 6. These more firmly establish the kind of feel the track has, as well as the kind of sound to expect in this track. At measure 9, the bass beat begins what I term the next section of the piece.

First Textural Buildup: For the next 8 measures this builds in texture, with at slight drop out in sounds at measure 17, only to introduce sounds in the next 8 measures (4, 5 and 8). This texture keeps thickening until measure 41, at which point there are at least 8 simultaneous sounds that make up the musical texture. At measure 41, these textures drop out slightly, leading up to a complete drop-out of rhythmic textures at measure 49, the end of this section.

Major Buildup: The third section of this notated segment lasts from measure 49-65 and is a slow, gradual buildup featuring an increasingly-loud 'wind' sound, with a decrease in volume of all rhythmically-strong patterns until a steady pulse of 16th notes in measure 65, combined with a syncopation that eventually leads to the

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[14] These are my terms, not terms generally used within the dance community. In my experience, DJs will generally not discuss tracks with this type of 'technical' syntax.

resumption of a steady beat and more even texture in measure 66 (not notated). This large buildup varies slightly from the preceding measure and phrase structure in that it ends with an additional 8 beats, or half of a measure, creating a delayed 'return' to the preceding rhythm and texture. This delayed return is complicated by the syncopations in measure 65, a musical move that would catch most dancers off-guard with such an interesting 'hook,' an intended effect.

The remainder of the track, not transcribed, contains another major buildup, very similar in structure to the first one.

Part of the difficulty in transcribing 'thrust 1' lies in its use of sound. As the transcription illustrates, there is a relatively simple rhythmic flow that is occasionally modified as a pick-up to a new phrase (see, for example measure 32, where sounds 8, 10, and 5 create an interesting syncopation preceding the arrival of sound 12 in measure 33). The meter stays relatively constant, at 128 BPM. Sounds 5, 7, and 13, however, are not rhythmically structured for the most part, though sound 5 does have a sixteenth-note pattern it follows for 8 measures starting at measure 33. In addition to their lack of rhythmical structure, these three sounds actually change over a measure or phrase. The change is a change in timbre, a change in what frequencies are highlighted, how loud the sound is, how long a pitch change is drawn out, or how much reverb is used. There is no adequate existing notation to illustrate these changes; there is no tonal structure to most of the sounds. Yet each measure can be heard as a measure; each 8-measure line can even be heard as a unit; my three

divisions of the piece are audibly distinguishable. Sound, timbre, delineate those units, give the piece form.

In the first four minutes of this piece we are exposed to 14 clearly distinguishable sounds that also change as the piece progresses. 'thrust 1' is about those 14 changing sounds. Those sounds create sections, give direction, create buildups, and confuse dancers. Ultimately, the structure is a sound structure, and sound is the key to understanding how this piece 'works.'

Set

A DJ performs sets. A set is a concept used in most popular music performance; a series of musical works performed one after the other with very little break. A DJ set differs from most other performance sets in that there are virtually no breaks between tracks, and a set lasts anywhere from less than one to (rarely) more than six or eight hours. The most common length of a headliner DJ (the main DJ hired for a night) set is 2 or 3 hours.

The turntables allow a DJ to adjust the speed of the records, stop the records or play them backward by simply grabbing the record, and 'scratching' the record by sliding it forward and backward under the needle. The mixer allows them to play two (or more) records simultaneously, alternate between records, and adjust different frequency volumes from both or either record. Skills at manipulating the tracks in this way are highly valued, and have actually developed into an art form called

'turntablism,' complete with competitions, albums, touring artists and groups. However, in most dance genres the skills a DJ possesses in manipulating vinyl is almost secondary to his or her choice of vinyl.

Fikentscher devotes a chapter of his book to "the cult and culture of the DJ." In it, he states:

> Somone who has mastered the operation of two, or even three turntables and a mixer is thus not necessarily a good DJ...A DJs technical skill is thus at best equal to his choice in repertoire. (2000, 38)

This sentiment is echoed by almost all dance DJs. Lori hifi Princess, a Techno/trance DJ from New York, when talking about becoming a DJ, explained to me:

> Honestly, anyone can beat match. Right now, you, I can give you a pair of decks[15], some records, two weeks, three weeks, you won't be good, but you're going to know what to do… People should start collecting records first, because that's what sets you apart, it's your style, what you do, what you're creating, you know? (2000)

Repertoire is what 'makes' a DJ's style, and is the most important feature of learning to DJ. In DJ sets, either live or on mix tapes or albums, the tracks in a set are not always the same length, some DJs play bits of one track while another is playing, and while the choice of repertoire is important, but even more intriguing is the use of that

---

[15] Turntables.

repertoire. This is not necessarily the 'mixing and scratching,' obviously technical skills of mixing a record, but simultaneous playing of, or switching between segments of tracks. While some DJ sets consist of one complete track played after another, it is quite common, particularly in rave or party-type club nights, when there is a larger, focused crowd, for a DJ to play only short segments of some tracks, or extended periods of two tracks at once, interspersed with full tracks.

The 4-measure phrase, the 'phrase' I discussed in reference to "Thrust 1", also almost never varies. DJs almost invariably bring in a segment, drop the bass line out, scratch a second track, play with the equalizer, or switch between tracks within that same 'phrase' structure. This is deliberate, and lies at the heart of my argument regarding the formation of a set. I will return to this point later.

I argue that there is something beyond a choice of repertoire and technical skills that make up a set. A set is the creation of a series of musical phrases connected to form one long musical experience. Those musical phrases are phrases taken from tracks; thus performing a set is not simply a matter of choosing tracks, but in choosing phrases from tracks. To illustrate this, I turn to two examples of phrasing within dance sets.

Figure 5 - DJ Rob Tryptomene
(Photo Ron Tupas)

Tryptomene

Styles of DJ'ing vary not only among styles of dance music (DJs will tend to mix trance differently than techno), but also among DJs.[16] Edmonton DJ Tryptomene, one of the technically best DJs in Alberta, is an example of a DJ who rarely plays an entire track without some element of cutting or layering. This type of mixing, very effective in the acid techno genre Tryptomene aligns himself with, illustrates how phrases are used in the construction of a set.

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[16] For a more complete history of DJs, including some discussion of types of DJing, see Poschardt (1998).

My first set example is a short set played by Tryptomene at the nightclub Trade on March 3, 2001. "Spring Fevah," a party that had been originally scheduled for that night in a local community hall, had been postponed for a month. Nevertheless, one of the headliners, Madame Zu, a British techno DJ, was still able to play that night in Edmonton, and so was booked to play at the club Trade. Tryptomene, one of the organizers of the party, and Crunchee, a well-known Edmonton hard house and happy hardcore DJ, played an hour set each before her 2-hour set that began around 12:30 am.

Having seen Tryptomene perform a number of times around Edmonton, I had wanted to videotape one of his sets to gain a closer look at the length he played tracks. He agreed to let me tape this set, despite the last minute change in venue that would almost definitely affect the size of crowd. I set up the video camera to one side of the DJ booth, letting it run uninterrupted for what turned out to be both Tryptomene and Crunchee's sets. During the course of the night I danced and socialized, paying virtually no more attention to the camera until after Tryptomene's set.

I have created two graphs, figures 5 and 6, illustrating Tryptomene's 50-minute set. In both graphs, the top and bottom horizontal lines each represent a turntable. The third, middle, horizontal line indicates time, in minutes, from left to right. I will now address each graph individually.

54
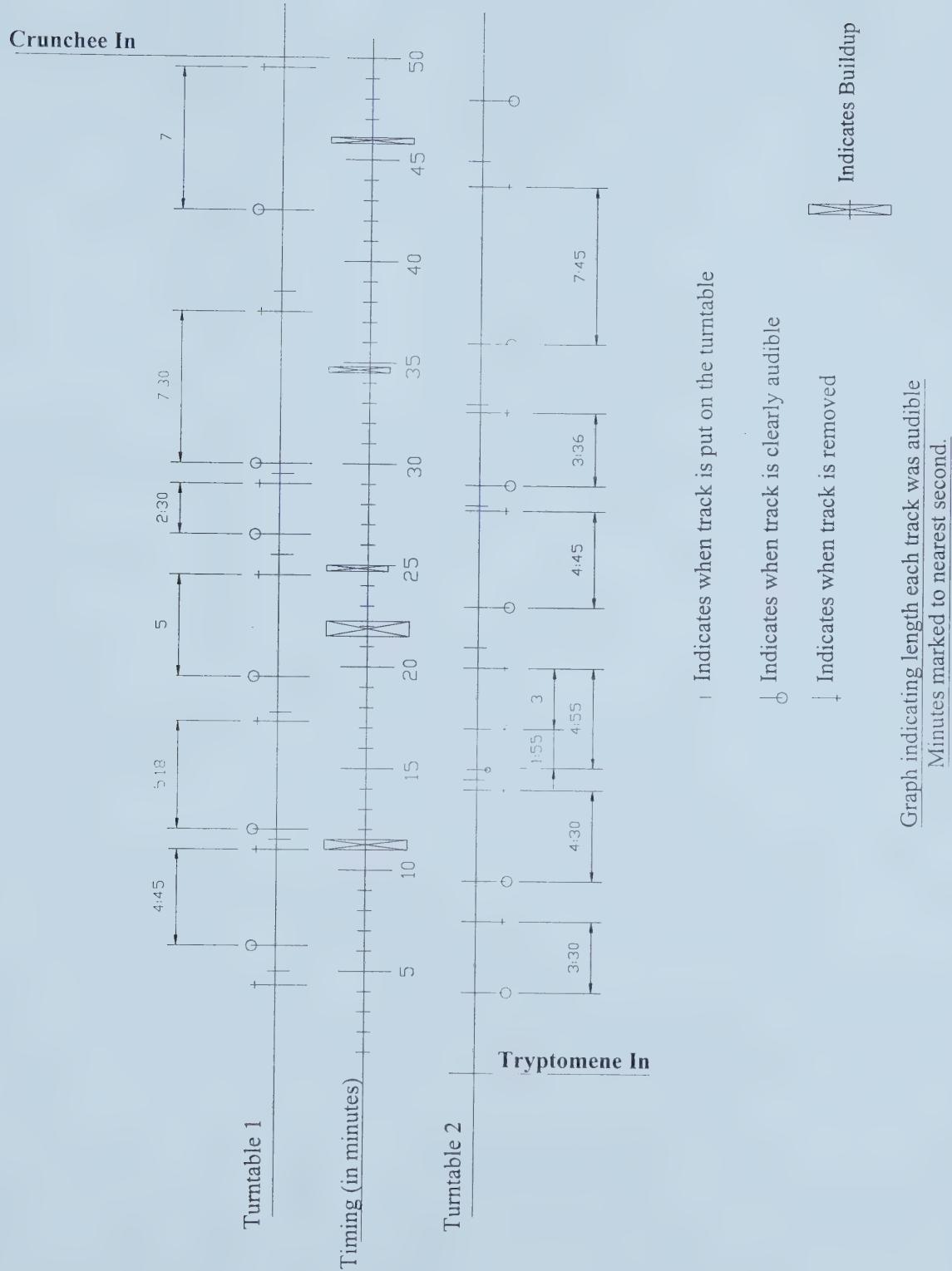
Figure 6 – Tryptomene's Set A: track timing.
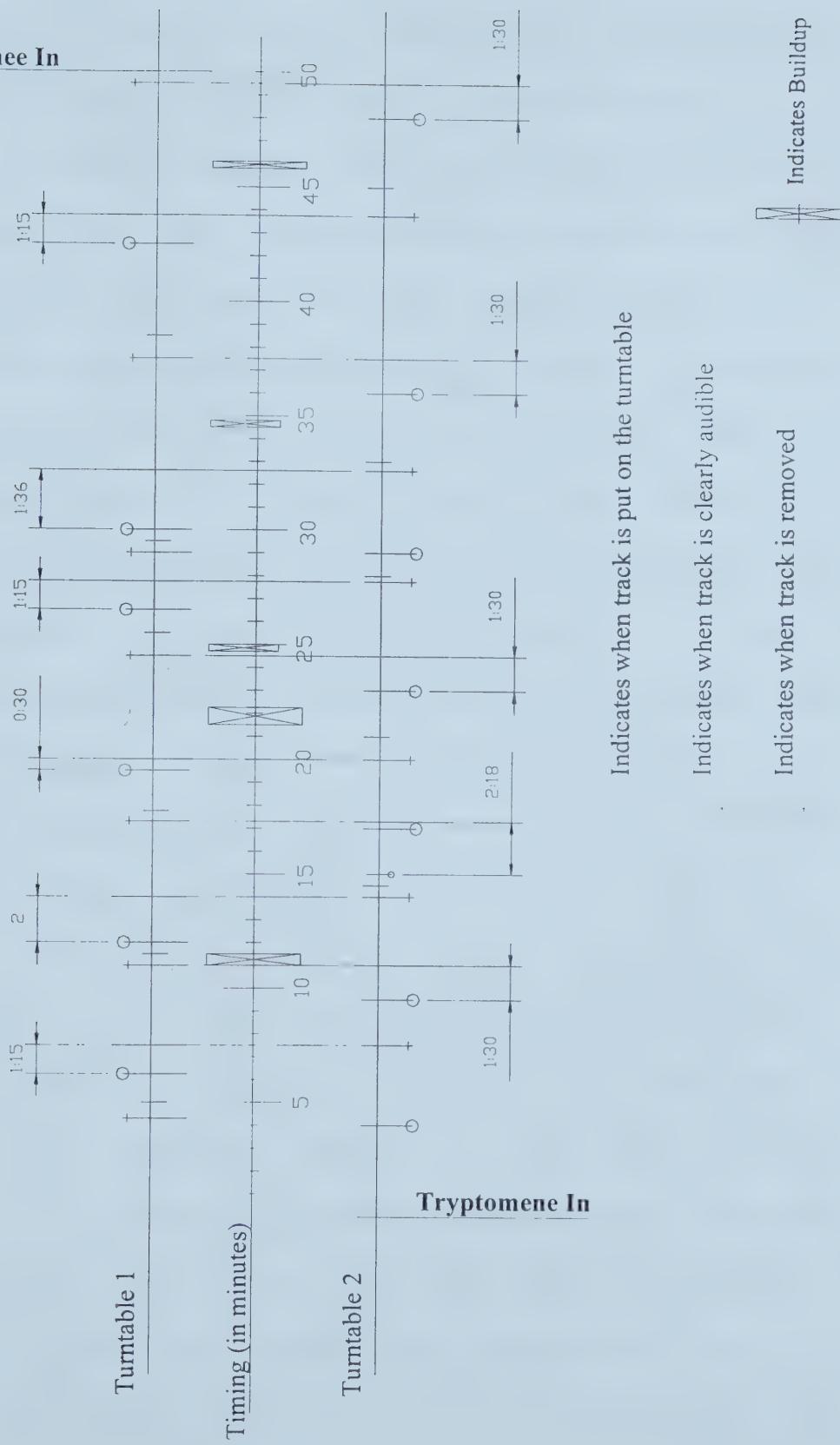
Figure 7 – Tryptomene's Set B: track overlap.

Figure 6 shows when each track was clearly audible in the mix, and when each track was removed, indicated to the nearest second. Due to the relatively poor sound quality of my recording,[17] as well as the extremely subtle shifting between often similar sounds between tracks, I was not always able to tell for sure when each track was playing; thus, the times are only approximate, though close enough to demonstrate the relatively short periods of time each track played. In a 50-minute set, Tryptomene played a total of 13 records. Each track was audible for as short as 3 minutes, and as long as 8. The third track on turntable 2 was partly audible for one section, then clearly audible for a longer period slightly later. I have indicated this by marking a longer, 5 minute section divided into 2 and 3 minute sections. A track, depending on the speed at which it is played (33 or 45 rpm, plus the added aDJustable speed of the turntable) is either around 5 or 11 minutes long. Over half of each track was played, generally with two to three minutes omitted or played at a level that was not clearly audible in the mix. There are also five markings on the timeline in the middle. These indicate major buildups in his set. Techno often contains shorter and simpler buildups, with only a drum beat left out for a 'measure' before kicking in again with a louder and fuller texture, or all other textures except the drum beat 'dropping out' for a similar effect, differing from more melodic genres, which often have extensive harmonic and textural features developed through their buildups. But there are also larger buildups in techno, with a thinning of the texture, a dropping of the drumbeat, and then a buildup both of rhythmic and sonic textures to some sort of climax. These are the buildups I noted in figures 6 and 7, indicating the approximate

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[17] I unthinkingly never considered bringing extra cable to take a direct feed off the mixer, and so ended up with the audio only from the camera's microphone

length of each buildup. In the set, there were five major buildups. These buildups led into a change in track (once the music 'got going' after the buildup, he brought in the second track), but there were not always buildups between track changes or even during each track.

Figure 7 shows the amount of overlap between each track, also indicated to the nearest second. By "overlap," I mean the amount of time both tracks were audible, either both at full volume simultaneously, or, when Tryptomene switched back and forth between tracks, or played one track louder than the other, fading one in or out. From this table we see Tryptomene consistently layered textures from one track with another, not playing a track in its entirety before putting on the next one.

Most interesting to note is that the groupings of 16 beat loops, the 'measure' units I examined in 'thrust 1,' never varied for the 50 minutes. Starting with his first track, through until Crunchee started playing, the pattern of when each new musical idea entered, when each buildup developed, when each phrase began and ended, always stayed within a 16-beat 'measure' structure. This is typical for a DJ set, and is deliberate; a DJ will 'cue up' their next track to match the existing 'phrase' pattern of the playing track.

When combined with the significant overlap and mixing Tryptomene demonstrated, this consistent phrase structure illustrates something important about set structure. The basic unit throughout his set was a measure structure, not a track structure. He

played records for different lengths, varied the timing of the buildups, but kept the basic stream of 16-beat measures. This gives a new perspective on what a set is, and what a track is in a set. Similar to how 'Thrust 1' was a musical piece constructed of buildups, using a phrase structure to organize timbre and rhythm, Tryptomene's set was a single musical piece, constructed of buildups, using a similar phrase structure to organize timbre and rhythm. The musical phrases were phrases from existing tracks, but often combinations of two existing records, layers of textures from existing pieces. A set is thus not simply a collection of songs that 'go together,' or match each other in speed or timbre; a set is a series of musical phrases, with buildups throughout, the same as a track but in a macro structure.

Before further discussing the notion of a set as a single musical unit, I want to expand the notion of musical phrase within a set by turning to a moment in another set by British DJ Mark EG.

Mark EG

On March 16, 2000, Mark EG, a British DJ, played at the Edmonton club Lush. Known, and occasionally criticized, for completely hyper, bizarre, unique, and "over-the-top" performances, he characteristically shouted and danced his way through a 2-hour set. At one point during the second hour, he slowly accelerated the record he was playing with his finger, a relatively common DJ 'trick.' As the music became too fast to dance to, people on the dance floor stopped dancing and watched as he eventually ran out of record and the music stopped. In the silence of the previously

loud club he screamed "come on, let 'em fuckin' have it" and the crowd went

absolutely wild with cheering and screaming. He turned around to his record

collection, pulled out another record, put it on, and the dancers started dancing madly

again. Significantly, he kept the dancers' attention, even when no music was playing,

while he calmly got another record. There was a period of roughly 20 seconds where

there was no music playing, and where there was not even a record on either

turntable. In an art form where continuous sound is so paramount to creating the

musical space, this kind of silence can 'kill' a dance floor. But that period of silence

had the complete opposite effect. It became part of the music, became a sort of

musical phrase. This kind of 'musical phrase' demonstrates another level of phrases

in a set. In Mark EG's performance, the moment the music became too fast to dance

to until the track finished was one type of phrase, followed by a 'phrase' of silence

and mindless shouting ("Come on…"), followed again by once again danceable

music.

In this way we see there are phrases that follow measure structures that are the

building blocks of each track and each set, but there are also phrases of larger musical

moments. Turning back to Tryptomene's set, there were 16-beat measure units that

made up the entire performance, but there were also larger, not so easily quantifiable

musical phrases; an entire buildup, a section where he played extensively with

layering two textures, a section where he let one track play for several minutes on its

own, a section with no buildup. There are thus measures, 8-measure phrases, and

larger macro-phrases combined to create a single set unit. This kind of macro

phrasing in sets, usually called pacing, is discussed in other studies of dance culture

(see Fikentscher (2000) 33-56, 84, for example). Pacing is often discussed in terms

of a journey, a trip, through a set, usually from a dancer's perspective. This pacing is

also a physical pacing. Fikentscher discusses the importance of pacing to a dancer

"as instantaneous translation of sound into motion, or else as exhaustive workout,

structured by a balance of stretches of time given to exertion versus relaxation" (85).

The pacing is a way to organize a physical activity, dancing, over an extended period.

I suggest the physical pacing is not only a pacing of dancing, but of physically felt

sound experiences. The set is a physical, textural, sound process, regardless of

whether one dances or not.

Conclusion

I want to now combine my earlier discussion on musicological differences among

genres with notions used in my discussion on musical phrases, both as parts of a track

and as parts of a set. I have previously discussed how the intrinsic physicality of

music is fundamental to all dance genres. The elements that define dance music are

textures, sounds, and tempo, and thus the music creates meaning at the physical level.

Each of the musical phrases that goes into either a track or set are thus physical

experiences, and a set becomes a series of not only musical phrases, but physical

experiences. Tryptomene's set illustrates layering and manipulation of musical

phrases to create a single set unit. Tryptomene thus created a type of physical

experience, unique to that set. That physical experience included five major buildups,

textures from thirteen tracks, and constant manipulation of equalizer, volume and mixing with those tracks. In Mark E. G.' s performance, the silence, his voice, the music itself, and the screams of the crowd were also sonic textures. The set experience is thus a series of sonic experiences, and so varying textures, both within tracks and without (when there was only silence) all became part of a set of textures.

Dance music can thus be understood as a physical activity, not only because it is played while one dances, but because meaning is created at the level of physical sound; experiencing dance music is about experiencing sound.

Chapter 3: Context

We had been waiting in line for over an hour, a line up of almost a thousand people outside the Sportex. This was the first party I'd been too at the Sportex in almost a year, the biggest party in Edmonton in over eight months. Called "Viva Las Vegas," it featured over twenty-five DJs and had sold out the 3500 capacity venue. We were a group of almost fifteen, going to meet more friends who had arrived three hours earlier and were already inside. As we finally got to the door, an efficient team of volunteers and workers took our tickets, put wristbands on us, checked us for drugs, took our coats, and shuffled us into the main room. Along one wall, booths sold club clothing, temporary tattoos, fruit, and water. There was also a booth for the newly-formed Right to Dance Coalition run by Edmonton Ravesafe, and a photo booth running a contest for best dressed Elvis and best dressed showgirl. A huge tent-like structure hung from the ceiling in front of the main stage, as over a thousand people already in attendance danced to house and trance music. At the other side of the room, facing the opposite direction, a second stage featured house and breakbeat DJs as well as an R&B band. A side room housed a third DJ setup featuring drum and bass and techno. Around the outside of the main room, people with blankets spread on the floor sat in groups talking, watching, and listening to the music. Too loud to talk comfortably, and too dark to see well, the sold-out event felt completely otherworldly.

Figure 8- Dancers wating in line for "Viva Las Vegas"

(Photo Greg St. Onge)
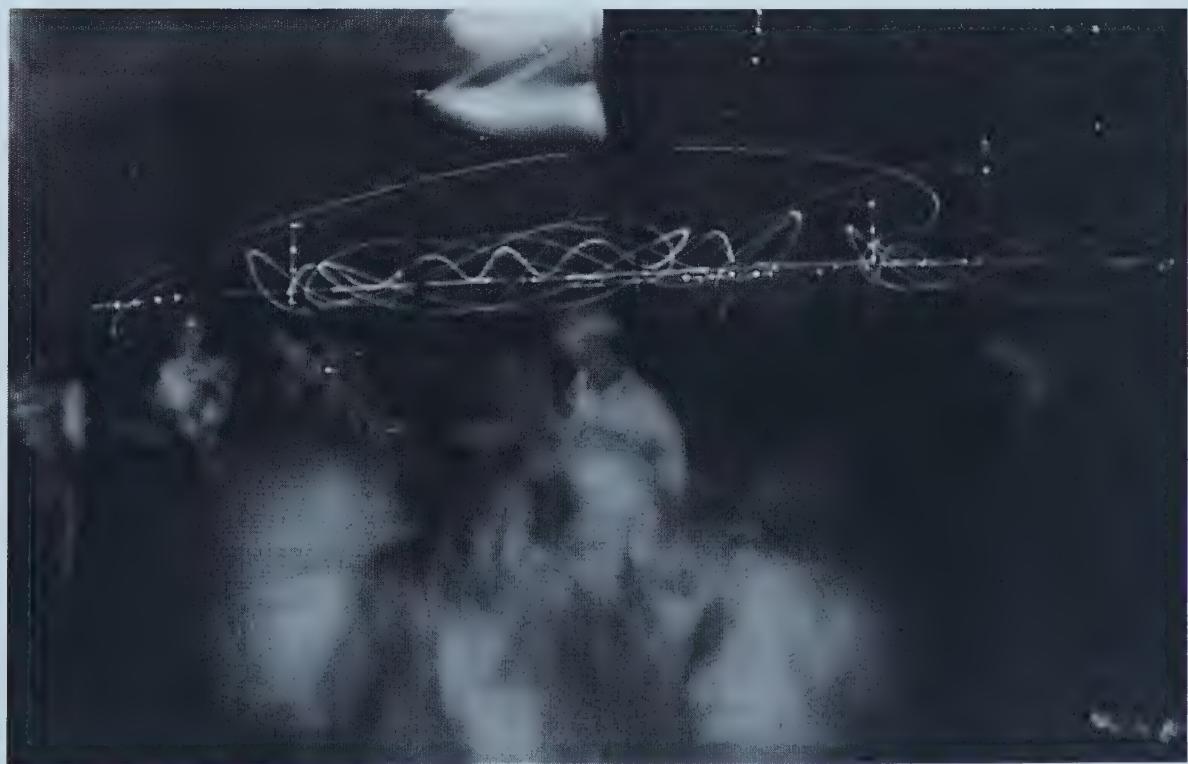
Figure 9 - Lasers swirl above dancers heads at "Viva Las Vegas"

(Photo Greg St. Onge)

Having explored a level of poetics found in the sounds of dance music, I want to now explore where those sounds are experienced. While people listen to dance music in their cars and homes, the public settings for dance music are almost always dance clubs or spaces rented and 'made up' for dance events, spaces instantly recognizable as event spaces. In examining those spaces, I want to explore yet another way a more general 'dance experience' can be understood as a physical, bodily experience.

This chapter is in two parts. After exploring the two main types of space commonly used for dance music events, I draw some conclusions about how visual aspects of those spaces parallel the textural aspects of the music.

Dance Spaces

In arguing for the importance of ethnography in popular music studies, Sara Cohen points out how "ethnography takes the form of a direct encounter, a shift from strictly theoretical formulations to a domain that is concrete and material" (1993, 132). Suggesting ethnography connects theory with a "social reality" (1993, 132), she proposes that fieldwork benefits the theory that grows out of it. She suggests ethnography adds a dynamic dimension involving interweaving relationships among physical places and types of musical sound, communities, and identity. This chapter aims to explore the spatial dimension of dance music, of experiencing dance music ethnographically. In doing so, I hope to explore how the space is part of a music experience.

Keith Negus, in *Popular Music in Theory* (1996), invokes space in his chapter

entitled "Geographies." In it, he discusses cultural imperialism and how popular

music is disseminated through the world, and moves toward a discussion tying sound

to place, looking specifically at Sarah Cohen's work on the Liverpool music scene

and Curtis and Rose's work on the 'Miami Sound.' Ultimately, he argues three points

regarding space and music: first, the "material circumstances" of any place

contributes to the production and dissemination of a particular sound; second, certain

"instruments, rhythms and voices can be employed to communicate a symbolic sense

of the identity of a place;" and third, listening to a music can involve recognizing and

relating to a space (1996, 189).

Taking his first premise as a starting point, I suggest not only that material

circumstances of a place contribute to a particular sound, but also that the dance

spaces used to consume music are integral to a type of sound experience. Early

"Detroit techno" has a particular crisp, futuristic, impersonal electronic sound.

Speaking of Cybotron, a team of Detroit techno producers working in the early

1980's, Reynolds argues:

> *The vision underlying Cybotron songs was Detroit-specific, capturing a*
>
> *city in transition: from industrial boomtown to post-Fordist wasteland,*
>
> *from US capital of auto manufacturing to US capital of homicide. (1996,*
>
> *19)*

This assertion echoes Negus' argument and is a similar direction taken in discussions of hip hop music (see Rose 1994, Forman 2000, Krims 2000). Specific sounds grow out of, and grow to represent, specific places. In this chapter I suggest that specific spaces not only contribute to a type of sound, they contribute to a type of sound experience. That sound experience, dance music, happens in specific environments that are fundamental to the experience of that music. Dance spaces across Edmonton, and across the world, share some aspects that make them recognizable as dance spaces. Through examining two main types of dance spaces used in Edmonton, I suggest those shared aspects, which contribute to a sonic experience, are visual aspects. Further, those visual aspects can be understood in the same way I suggested the sounds of dance music can be understood through textures.

Edmonton Spaces

Most dance events in Edmonton happen in one of two types of locations: in clubs, at what are called "club nights"; or at other venues, usually community halls, 'made up' or re-designed for parties, also called raves (terms used interchangeably in Edmonton). Clubs in Edmonton are divided into evening or ordinary dance clubs, and after-hours clubs. Liquor licensing in Alberta requires establishments that serve liquor to close at 3:00 am, and so none of the liquor-serving clubs are open after 3:00. After-hours clubs open at 2:00 am, stay open as late as noon, and do not serve alcohol. There are further divisions based on age restrictions. Typically, there are

18+ events and clubs (18 being the legal drinking age in Alberta), and 16+ events and clubs. Clubs constantly change ownership as well as format ('top forty, Celtic pub, dance club), and the Edmonton scene is constantly shifting. At the time of this writing, there are approximately fifteen clubs in Edmonton that cater to the dance community for at least one or two nights a week. Figure 8 displays the Edmonton club scene according to alcohol and age restrictions.

Where to go	If you are 16+	If you are 18+
Clubs: **evening-3am**	Arrival Ever After (midnight-11am)	Ansazi Backroom Vodka Bar Calientes Halo Lush New City Suburbs Parliament The Rev
Clubs: **afterhours** (all non-alcohol)	The Gallery Therapy	Life (formerly Trade, hosts Sunday afternoon after-after-hours) Sublime

Figure 10 – Main Dance Clubs in Edmonton as of June, 2001

All of the 18+ evening clubs host club nights catering to the dance crowd, while none of them play exclusively dance music. Most commonly, dance music nights occur on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, with other types of music played on other nights of the week (more hip-hop, 'rock,' or top 40 oriented). Dance music's rising popularity with a more mainstream culture in Edmonton, demonstrated by the thriving dance culture-influenced fashion and music stores that specialize in vinyl

recordings and fashion directed toward people who dance (some stores include DV8, Foosh, Feroshus, and Colorblind), as well as the popularity of some dance music programs on 'Top Forty" stations (Power 92's weekly broadcast of Toronto's Chris Sheppard's "Pirate Radio"), is evident in more mainstream nightclubs as well. Typically 'Top Forty' clubs such as Red's in West Edmonton Mall now bring in superstar DJs (DJ Rap on June 24, 2001, for example), or occasionally feature local dance DJs.

Most events held outside weekly dance music nights are now held in halls of some type, and occasionally in warehouses. The larger-scale events of even a year ago have all but disappeared in Edmonton due to lack of property owners willing to take the perceived risks associated with hosting an event, and lack of promoters willing to take the risks associated with organizing them.[18] Generally, the tendency has been to move into the clubs and bring in famous DJs for smaller club nights. An example of this trend are the "Big DJ Small Club," invite-only, events put on by Calgary's Defstar Productions: club nights featuring internationally famous DJs who play for crowds of only a few hundred in a club in Edmonton or Calgary. Almost all of these 'one-time' dance events happen on Saturday nights.

The average club holds 500 or fewer people, and a regular club night that draws more than 200 'does well.' Large-scale events draw up to three and four thousand people, though rarely, and most parties average between 300 and 800 people.

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[18] Risks regarding numbers of ticket sales required to make money at an event as well as possibilities of media and police involvement which often cast negative images of dance events to a more general public, further affecting ticket sales.

Figure 11 – Parliament

(Photo by Author)

Figure 12 – The Entrance to Lush

(Photo by Author)

Club Nights

"Club nights" happen in Edmonton most nights of the week. Generally, a promotion company (sometimes the same company that owns the club) will have a "resident DJ" or several DJs who take turns playing at a club every week on a particular night. That re-occurring night has a title, and guest DJs are brought in to play as part of that 'series.' That series is a series of club nights. Not all nights at a club, however, are club nights; often a club will have club nights only on weekends. One therefore usually has a choice among several different club nights on Friday and Saturday nights, but only one or two options for club nights early in the week. Changing promotion companies, club ownership, and promotional decisions at clubs also mean that current club nights are constantly changing, with specific club nights rarely lasting more than a year or two.

"Shake! Thursdays"

An example of this kind of series is 'Shake! Thursdays' at Parliament, a club on Whyte ave., near the university district in Edmonton. "Shake! Thursdays" are produced by Nexustribe, one of the larger promoters in the Edmonton area who also own Parliament. Advertising for club nights is done by means of flyers and email notices. The "Shake!Thursdays" flyer is shown in figures 13 and 14. An email advertisment for "Shake!Thursdays" of March 2001 is shown in Figure15.

Figure 13 – Front of "Shake Thursdays" Flyer

SOLO
GEOFFRY J

PASCAL [vancouver]
ENDORPHIN [vancouver]
DR. J [regina]
EMOTION [calgary]
KARIZMA [calgary]
VASS
TRISTAN
MR. ROWLEY
SOULUS
STYLES

for dj schedules please check
www.nexustribe.com

Parliament
10551 82 Ave
Doors @ 9pm
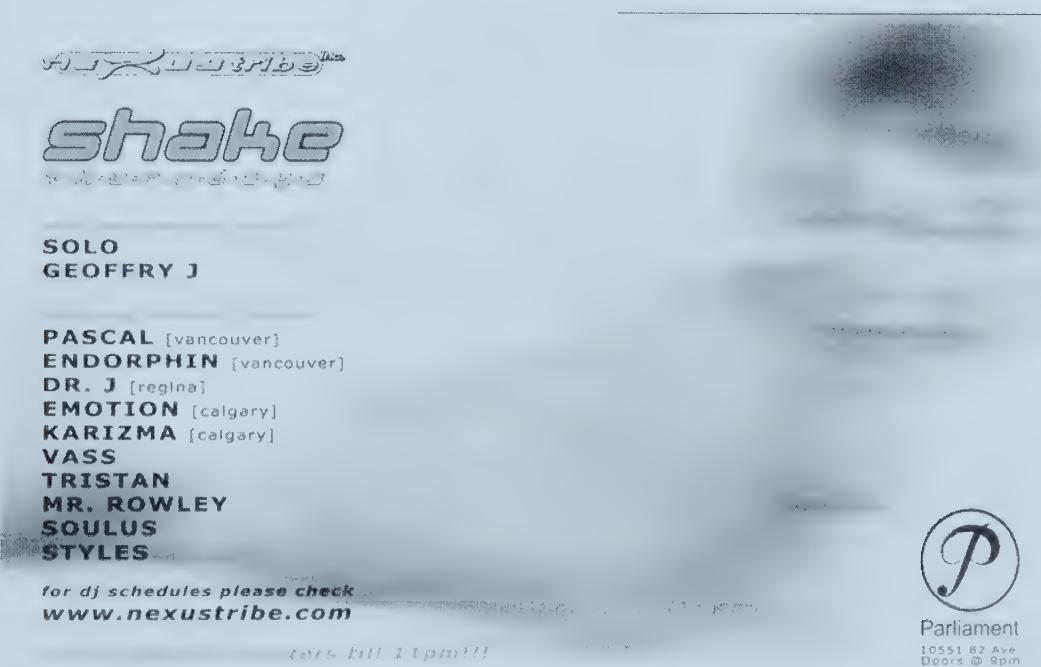
Figure 14 - Back of "Shake! Thursdays" Flyer

Shake!

Thursdays @ Parliament.

With your hosts..
Geoffrey J, Solo & Styles

and our guest headliners:

Mar 1st
DJ EMOTION
CD Release Party!!
(free CD for the first 100 through the doors, we advise everyone to come out early! This will definitely be another shaker!)

Mar 8th
MARK EG
Bonzai, Cluster, Planet Rhythm, Wax Mag/ Leeds, UK
There is only one word to describe this DJ.
"madness"
more details next week..

Mar 15th
ENDORPHIN
K Zone, Kelowna

Mar 22nd
PASCAL F.E.O.S
PV Records - Frankfurt, Germany
(Remixer of the world-wide smash hit of Azzido Da Bass - Doomsnight!)
This DJ has produced some of the best in techno, house and trance. He has done remixes along side Timo Mass and Oilver Lieb, and John Digweed, just to name a few. Tickets Available soon..

Apr 5th
NICKY'S ANGELS
(featuring **Emotion**(calgary), **Hussy**(calgary), and **Soulus**
Three of Alberta's top female DJs, who are going to *SHAKE* some serious booty. Warning... These lady's have been train kick your ass!!

ALSO FEATURING:**75c hi-balls and shooters till 11pm!!!**

Parliament - 10551 82 Ave.
Doors open 9pm

Figure 15 – "Shake! Thursdays" Mail-out

Geoffrey J, Solo, and Styles are the resident DJs for this club night. This means every Thursday one or more of them take turns playing from the time the doors open at 9pm, until the headliner, the guest DJ, plays around 12:30 am. The headliner DJ then plays until 2:30, at which point the lights are turned back on and Parliament closes for the night. Headliner DJs are identified on the mailout by their record labels ("Bonzai, PV Records, etc."), and if they are not well known in Edmonton, also by the type of music they play. Most club nights feature one or two genres of music, with "Shake! Thursdays" featuring trance and house DJs.

Parliament holds approximately 550 people between two floors. It is located on Whyte avenue, a shopping and nightlife district near the University of Alberta. There are two floors, both equal in size, with a bar and pool tables on each floor, and a DJ booth and dance floor on each floor (see photos). At the time of this writing, the two floors have separate entrances, and often feature different styles of music. "Shake!Thursdays" take place on the lower floor.

Figure 16 - Dancers out to see DJ Tiesto at a "Shake! Thursday"

(Photo Greg St. Onge)

Figure 17 - A Less-Crowded Dance Floor at "Getting Lucky"

(Photo Ron Tupas)

Parties

In this discussion, I use the term "party" throughout to refer to what is typically called a party or rave within the dance community. Thus, "party" refers to a specific type of dance event. Originally taken from the British outdoor dance phenomena of the late eighties and early nineties, "rave" has been coined to describe large dance events held outside typical nightclub events. The terms "rave" and "party" are now generally used interchangeably in Edmonton to refer to 'non-club' events.

The party 'scene' in Edmonton is changing dramatically, as it is in most cities in western Canada. Increasingly difficult to find locations to hold large parties, most promotion companies are opting for club night events or smaller parties held in the few locations still available for dance events. The largest party ever held in Edmonton was in April of 2000, when Defstar Promotions, now a Calgary-based company, brought Paul Oakenfold, a major British trance DJ to a party called "Ascension 2000." There were approximately 5000 people in attendance. Since then, and partly because of the press surrounding that event,[19] most parties are held in smaller venues, community halls, and warehouses. The average number of people at such parties is around 500. There are still parties of well over 1000 people (1500+ at "Warm and Fuzzy II" on March 24, 2001); however, they tend to be very few and far

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[19] Several people were hospitalized with seizures during the elaborate strobe-light show. One person who was in attendance overdosed on prescription drugs a day later. The fact that they were at the party was a major feature in the local media. There were also problems with a lack of security staff at the doors, resulting in over a two-hour wait for some to get in. At the time of this writing, bylaw amendments to dance events are in development with Edmonton City Council.

between. The spring is often the 'busiest' time of year for parties, with events happening almost every weekend.

"Getting Lucky"

Edmonton Ravesafe is a local organization that supplies information on drug use and safety to the dance community. Similar to the larger American organization Dancesafe, Ravesafe provides ecstasy pill-testing kits, literature, condoms, and food at raves in the Edmonton area. Part of their mission statement, taken from their website, reads:

> *Our goal is to inform ravers about the risks of taking legal and illegal drugs, should they choose to take them, and how to avoid some of the inherent dangers associated with using them. We provide health and safety information in order to help ravers make informed decisions in order to reduce these risks.* (ravesafe.org)

In conjunction with Planned Parenthood, Edmonton Ravesafe hosted a fundraising party on March 17, 2001 at the Asian Christian Community Association (ACCA) center in southeast Edmonton. This party was typical of most small parties in Edmonton (fewer than 1000) in its general size and feel. The ACCA center functions as a community hall, regularly used by church groups, and is one of the few venues in Edmonton with a landlord still willing to rent space for parties.

As with club nights, parties are advertised by flyers. Figures 19 and 20 show the flyer for "Getting Lucky," with information on the DJ lineup and what to expect. Typical of most parties held outside clubs, "Getting Lucky" was a no-alcohol event, and, interestingly, held in a no-smoking building. Not licensed, it also was a 16+ event, meaning anyone 16 years old and older could get in. The headliner DJ was Deko-Ze, a Toronto-based trance DJ.

Figure 18 - Front of "Getting Lucky" Flyer

DEKO-ZE PLASTICPUPPETMOTIVE/TRIBE/1GROOVE.COM
WWW.PLASTICPUPPETMOTIVE.COM

DR. J JELLY JAR/PPM/SOUL MATES

TRYPTOMENE FOOSH/TRIPDAMIND

CARY CHANG

CRUNCHEE HAPPY BASTARDS

DAVID STONE LUSH/DVB RECORDS/VURB.COM

BEATCREEP LIVE PA GINGERBREAD HOUSE RECORDS

DJ DELUXX FREQUENCY CJSR/ATMOSPHERE

DA CIELO FLUX COLLECTIVE

SOULUS

Pre Party: Thursday March 15 @ Bootcamp Vodka Bar
Restaurant: Deluxx, Altius, Sense, Dwelle
Security by Ubm and Event Security
Visuals by Aquna, One Media

9PM-6AM / 16+ ROAR
Location TBA week of event

Ticket Prices:
Earlybird 100 @ $20
Advance 400 @ $25
More at the door...
so buy early!

Tickets available at:
DVB Records   780 469 7449
Foosh   780 491 0380
Fenestras   780 491 0436
Planned Parenthood   780 423 3737
Calgary Fenestras   403 245 6941

For one reservation format of Fonts opens at:
www.ravesafe.ca
Infoline: 780.428.1539

SATURDAY MARCH 17 2001

edmonton
ravesafe
www.ravesafe.ca

GLDa EVENT

Figure 19 - Back of "Getting Lucky" Flyer

There were three main spaces at "Getting Lucky": a main dance room, a downstairs dance room, and a 'chill out' tent outside the building. The party began at 9 p.m. and ended just before 6:00 a.m. For that entire time, DJs played in both the upstairs and downstairs rooms. DekoZe, the headliner, played in the main room from 1:00-4:00 a.m. The 'chill-out' tent was open the entire night, with chairs, couches, and blankets for people to sit on. As part of the association with a charity fundraiser, there were also information booths set up in the tent by various health organizations (Planned Parenthood, Edmonton Aids Network). Slower, ambient, or downtempo music was played in the tent the entire night, from a computer set up in one corner.

The spaces

The spaces used for both "Shake!" and "Getting Lucky" differ on some levels. "Shake!" was held in a club, on one floor, with pool tables, a bar, chairs and tables, a designated dance floor and a DJ booth. "Getting Lucky" happened in a community hall, on two floors, with an additional tent outside, with nothing in each of the main dance rooms to sit on other than the floor.

On other levels, the spaces are very similar. Arguably, dance music is experienced primarily on the dance floor at both events. The speakers are directed toward the floor, the DJ booth sits on one side of it, people dance to the music. The space on the dance floor is the space in the club designed to provide the best sound, arguably the best 'music experience'; there are rarely speakers pointing away from the dance floor

or located in any other part of the club other than the dance floor. At Parliament, the dance floor is a discrete section of the club, the rest of the club containing pool tables, chairs, and a bar. At the ACCA center, that dance floor is expanded to include two entire rooms.

However, I argue the similarity is not simply a similarity of function. Both spaces looked the same. Both were dark, with a sophisticated light system. "Getting Lucky" looked remarkably like the dance floor of "Shake!" without the surrounding tables, chairs, and bar. In this way they could be seen as the same space, but "Shake!" had additional activities (pool, tables) and drugs (alcohol and cigarettes), while "Getting Lucky" had additional visual activities (slides, film loops, lasers).

The Lighting

Usually quite dark, both club nights and parties are lit by an array of lights, often including strobes and lasers, pointing toward the dance floor, while other, usually smaller lamps (even household lamps), light the remainder of the space. The lighting is most sophisticated on the dance floor, where additional lights, slides, and film loops play on screens surrounding the dance floor. Film loops are short lengths of films, usually about a meter in length, taped in a loop, played on a film projector. Often, more than one film projector projects onto a single screen, and an operator will move among the projectors, changing the loops as the night progresses. There will also often be several screens on and around the dance floor, creating a constant

motion of looping patterns from up to six or eight film projectors, slide projectors, laser machines, and occasionally computer-operated projectors. These patterns do not necessarily match the pulse of the music, though occasionally strobes and other flashing lights might accompany build ups, and generally change as the projector and light operator(s) see fit.

A strong parallel can be drawn between the lighting, generally called "visuals," and the dance music that fills the same physical space. These visuals are not intended to provide a story, or even to necessarily 'go with' the music. I posit they are about a look, the same as music is about a sound. In the last chapter, I suggested dance music is "sound music;" it is music whose meaning can be found at the level of texture, not through an explicit message sung by an artist. I now suggest looping, changing, layered visual patterns are an ocular equivalent to the timbral music played at dance events. They are visually interesting 'measures' and 'phrases' meant to look good, interesting, funny, different, surprising. Their meaning is not in an explicit message told by a single projector or screen. Their meaning is in the visual textures and layering of short 'visual units.'

Visual extravagance is not limited to lighting. Most dancers 'dress up' to go dancing, particularly at parties, where the feeling of an 'event' is particularly strong. Dancers' costumes range from baggy clothing, hats, gloves, and masks, to skin-baring bikinis and shorts. These often elaborate costumes are, I suggest, another visual element of a textural world. Varying degrees of darkness, the use of "black lights," and the range

of colours in dance environments affect how dancers look to and at eachother. In this way, dancers themselves become part of a constantly shifting visual texture.

Figure 20 - Dressed up to Dance at Edmonton City Hall During the "Come Together" Rally
(Photo Greg St. Onge)

An interesting phenomenon rarely seen outside dance environments, visuals create an instant 'look' of a dance event. Hundreds of online photo galleries (gatecrasher.com, dieselrave.com, ravehard.com, etownravepage.com, ravelinks.com, raveworld.net) from dance cultures around the world show remarkably similar laser machines, projection screens, and costumes. While dance spaces may differ in relative size between a club night and a party (club nights provide additional games and recreational drugs), there is an underlying similarity between the functions of the dance floor and that of the entire space used at a party. Those spaces, the dance floors, are both spaces where textural manipulation in both sound and sight integrate to provide a 'sense' experience.

Chapter 4: State

Having discussed certain genres of music within a particular physical context, I now want to examine more closely how the bodies that experience dance music act and are acted upon. I will explore two aspects of musical engagement, the chemical experience and the dance experience. My fundamental premise is that neither the chemicals nor the physical nature of dance, which I argue can tell us something about dance music, are necessarily part of one's individual dance experience. Many people attend clubs or raves without taking drugs or dancing. However, both inform the kind of experience one has through creating the environments in which dance experiences take place. I argue that understanding both as physical elements within a dance experience can lead to an understanding of that dance experience at a physical level, in the same way I suggested dance music could be understood at the physical level of sound.

The Chemicals

As is well noted in other literature on dance cultures,[20] a long list of recreational drugs are common in the dance scene. Ecstasy, speed, acid, GHB, MDA, ketamine, marijuana, nicotine, and alcohol (to a lesser extent), were and continue to be a major part of dance cultures. However, their varying degrees of illegality render them extremely difficult topics to discuss at the same casual level of, say, fashion. In

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[20] See Reynolds (1999), Collins (1996), Push (2000), Lyttle et al. (1992), Fikentscher (1996, 2000), for further discussion of drug use in dance cultures.

addition, their role in the dance experience is very different for different people. That being said, some general comments on certain drug use in dance cultures can offer insight into important elements of those cultures.

In 1914, the German pharmaceutical company E Merck patented methylenedioxymethylamphetamine, a drug more commonly called MDMA. It was not used or developed after that time, with the exception of some non-human testing by the American military in the 1950's, until Alexander Shulgin, an American chemist, experimented with taking it in the late 1960's. His friend Leo Zeff, a psychologist, called the drug "Adam," and introduced it to hundreds of psychologists across America as a tool for therapy sessions. By stimulating the release of large amounts of serotonin in the brain, the drug produced empathic feelings in subjects that opened them up to expressing themselves and listening to others. By the early 1980's, MDMA was used not only in therapy sessions, but recreationally as well. Increased serotonin levels also enhanced people's sensations to sound, music and movement, and in 1985 the American DEA placed it on the schedule of illegal drugs, largely as a result of its widespread use in the Texan dance scene as a recreational drug commonly called "Ecstasy."[21]

In the online library of psychoactive plants and chemicals, "The Vaults of Erowid," Erowid's brief article on MDMA describes its effects:

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[21] See Push et al. (2000) for further essays on ecstasy, its therapeutic uses, psychological effects, and its role in the dance scene. Other discussions of the history of ecstasy can be found in Reynolds (1996), Erowid.org, Ecstasy.org, Collins 1997, and Saunders (1993).

When the full effects of MDMA manifest, barring an uncommon negative

reaction, users are likely to find that suddenly everything is right with the

world. The primary effects sought by those using MDMA recreationally are

the emotional openness, euphoria, stimulation, reduction of critical and

cynical thoughts, and decrease of inhibitions that can accompany its use.

(2000)

A 'night out' on ecstasy differed fundamentally from previously typical 'nights out.'

It created a culture of friendly, interested, excited, and almost childish dancers,

unafraid to dance, to meet new people, to wear interesting clothes and try new

adventures. Ecstasy's effect of making people 'in touch' with people around them,

interested in listening and caring, also fascinated by timbres and textures, started a

new type of musical experience. This drug became the drug most commonly taken at

nightclubs and dances particularly throughout Britain, where the 'rave' phenomenon

exploded in the late 1980's. It remains the drug most commonly associated with

dance music and dance culture.

Fifteen years after ecstasy use became widespread, it is now rarely found in a pure

form, and almost always is mixed with speed, caffeine, MDA (a relative of ecstasy),

or any number of related, sometimes dangerous drugs. This means there is virtually

never a dance crowd who are all on ecstasy, full of the goodwill and openness

produced by that drug. However, it does mean that there is generally a striking

atmosphere at parties and club nights that is dramatically more open and accepting

than most other 'top forty' club and bar environments.[22] The almost predatory atmosphere, particularly toward women, that exists in many bars is significantly different at dance events. An environment heavily influenced by a drug once used in therapy sessions, the 'dance environment,' speaking of both parties and club nights, tends to lean toward inclusivity and acceptance.

Ecstasy and Optimism About the Scene

As I suggested in chapter one, I find that some academic articles (see Hutson (1999) for a typical example), miss an important point regarding ecstasy's role in dance cultures. Overly optimistic about the possibilities for acceptance and tolerance due to the psychological effects of ecstasy, they neglect to recognize not only the complexity of recreational drug use (other drugs are used as well), but also the complexity of social relationships within dance cultures. The empathic and open characteristic of dance cultures, almost always a surprise for people new to the dance scene, is noticeable at any dance event. However, many people do not take any drugs at all, take other drugs (including alcohol), and are still the functioning adults they are when they are not out dancing. The 'dance crowd' is not simply a crowd on ecstasy. It is a crowd with a dynamic that has been influenced by ecstasy, a new dynamic of acceptance and openness, but that dynamic does not completely exclude other, more complex social relationships.

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[22] I am speaking more generally here of other innumerable sports bars and pubs in and around Edmonton.

Ben Malbon explores the notion of "playful vitality" in dance cultures in London. A combination of the notion of play and vitality, a "conception which may provide sense and a source of vitality or personal worth (146)," he argues playful vitality is a way meaning is achieved on the dance floor. Suggesting that current notions of both play and resistance are inadequate to discuss the clubbing experience, he argues:

> *The playful vitality of clubbing is communal, but unlike the communities ordained by politics, economics and histories – in short, by rationalism – the communalities of the dance floor are constituted by the instant and the ephemeral, by sociality, empathy, and non-rationality.* (2000, 164)

This "communality" includes a "utopian sentiment," but that sentiment is an experienced sentiment, not "the parameters of a utopian world (157)." By focusing on how each of the dancers he observed gained meaning, a sense of self, and experienced feelings of community and openness, while at the same time clearly experiencing very structured notions of style and "flow," he offers one explanation for a general attitude of acceptance and possibility in dance communities. At the same time, in labeling a general 'communality' as ephemeral or non-rational, he leaves little room for those who *do* create lasting friendships on the dance floor, or who identify strongly with dance communities (Fikentscher 2000).

To reconcile these conflicting perspectives, I examine the drug experience, not in relation to community (utopian or not), but in relation to the personal experience of a

dancer. The first large party I took ecstasy at left me feeling that there were no limits to the utopia available through dancing:

> *It was such an amazing experience for me. One that really brought my understanding of raves, and almost my understanding of myself, to a new level. It was so non-threatening, non-sexual, honest, beautiful, friendly, all of the things I like about life. It put me in that headspace for the rest of the week. It was such a generous experience.* (Personal field notes, May 2000)

A year and a half later, I wonder if that experience had anything to do with a 'real' framework for community or empathic utopia. I did not made new friendships at that rave, I have not moved any closer to understanding acceptance because of it. At the same time, it *did* change my perspective on raves, and it continues to resonate with my own feelings of generosity and life. This has to do with my experience. I did not become part of a dance community with utopist goals; I participated in a dance event that allowed the possibility of those goals to be part of my experience.

The dance experience is thus greatly informed, whether one takes drugs or not, by the ecstasy experience. The dance floor is a place one can and often does experience feelings of community, openness, and possibility. I posit it is naïve to suggest those experiences necessarily have a direct connection to a 'real' utopian plan, or even that those feelings take into account the complex and ever-changing rules of 'coolness'

and exclusivity in the club scene. But by recognizing a chemical, physical process as a major factor in the formation of attitudes and experiences at a club or party, I suggest we can understand that experience as yet another kind of physical experience.

Gilbert Rouget, in his discussion of music and possession, suggests music does not play a primarily physiological role in the onset of trance. Citing others who have argued for the physical effects of music (repeated rhythmic patterns, for instance) as possible causes for trance or possession, he suggests they

> *imply that the action of music is of the same order as that of a drug, which does, incontestably, act in a "physical" way. Although it is perfectly permissible to say, metaphorically, that music is a drug, in the present context, which is not that of metaphor, it simply contributes to general confusion.* (1985,183)

Implicit in his argument is that while music is culturally encoded, and though it does admittedly have physical effects, its effects are conditioned psychological effects. Drugs, on the other hand, are separate from those same culturally encoded psychological effects; they are physical, physiological. My challenge is to consider how drugs are part of, and form, a culturally encoded dance experience. Rather than suggesting drug use is either a necessary part of a dance experience, or that drugs are entirely outside a dance experience, I suggest drugs form part of the fabric of meaning found at a physical level. Attitudes, types of sensations, and ways of

experiencing a night of dance are informed by, and can at some level be understood at a physical, chemical level.

The Motions

Dance music is experienced in an environment where dancing is almost always present. Traditional rock concerts, "indie band" performances at bars, folk music performances, or country music events often feature a primarily seated audience; dancers are often only the people who "know how to dance" or who are particularly uninhibited. Club nights featuring headliner DJs almost always have a full dance floor, parties almost never have chairs, and an event with 2000 people will inevitably have 1500 people dancing at a time. People dance without partners, almost everyone faces the same direction, there are no set steps, and abilities in dance movement vary from jumping straight up and down to athletic acrobatics and occasionally break-dancing.[23] The physical act of dancing varies dramatically among dancers. Some stand quietly, nodding their heads or swinging their shoulders or hips with eyes closes; some run on the spot; others perform elaborate gymnastic moves. Dancers will sometimes wave a rectangular piece of white cloth in each hand, each approximately three feet by three feet, around in patterns, creating an effect of wings or sails encircling themselves. Dancers will also wave glow-in-the-dark plastic sticks and bracelets, creating interesting patterns of colour. This is for their own visual experience, but also for others to watch. Dancers will dance for hours at a time, stopping only to drink water or use the washroom.

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[23] There is relatively little discussion of types of dancing in electronic dance music, a topic that comes up in occasionally in Fikentscher (2000) and Collins (1996). Practicing, taking lessons, or even using names for dance moves is virtually unheard of in the Edmonton dance scene.

Figure 21 - Dancer at "Gatecrasher" at Red's, West Edmonton Mall.

(Photo Ron Tupas)

Figure 22 - Flag Dancers at "Come Together" Rally

(Photo Kelly Zenkewich)

Kai Fikentscher persuasively argues the central role dancing plays in the

Underground Dance Music community of New York:

> *Dancing, or "working (it) out" translates into a ritual in which the*
>
> *physical aspect of self, the body, is the instrument for renewing the*
>
> *spiritual or mental aspect of self, that is, the nonphysical aspects of*
>
> *identity.* (2000, 76)

Aspects of identity (Latinos, gays, and other members of the UDM scene) are played

out on the dance floor. In my experience of the Edmonton scene, the sense of

collectivity focuses primarily on dancing itself. A significant example of this was the

"Viva Las Vegas" event on June 9, 2001. Two days before the event, Edmonton

Mayor Bill Smith and three city aldermen[24] city hall made recommendations to the

"Planning and Development Department" to propose a bylaw that would shut all

dance events down at 3:00am, and set a midnight 'curfew' for dancers under 18,

making special provisions for "church dances or high school graduation parties that

might run past midnight" (O'Donnell, 2001). At the party, volunteers working for the

new "Right to Dance Coalition" circulated a petition for dancers to sign and show

their support for all-night dance events. Throughout the party, there was a strong

feeling of a dance community, particularly at 3 am, when it was announced that if the

bylaw were passed, events like "Viva Las Vegas" would be ending right then and

everyone would have to go home. The solidarity of the dancers at that point, as they

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[24] Allan Bolstad, Robert Noce, and Dave Thiele.

alternately cheered the event promoters and booed the City of Edmonton, was a solidarity based on a physical activity, dancing.

Susan Leigh Foster discusses "perceived" and "ideal" bodies as two concepts trained dancers work with throughout their learning. The perceived body is the tangible, felt, heard body dancers work; the ideal body is the "fantasized visual or kinesthetic images of a body, images of other dancers' bodies, and cinematic or video images of dancing bodies" (1997, 327). Throughout a dancer's training, both bodies are developed, "constructed in tandem; each influences the development of the other" (ibid, 327). She is interested in how dancing involves a real, physical body, composed of arms, legs, and torsos, something she feels many movement theorists move too quickly beyond to reach "a theoretical agenda that requires something unknowable or unknown as an initial premise" (235). This real body is the site of both the perceived and ideal bodies, and I suggest something similar can be understood with relation to untrained dancers in electronic dance music.

In many recreational dance settings such as weddings, country bars, or other settings requiring little formal dance training, the ideal body starkly contrasts with the perceived body. People dance the two-step or a waltz with visibly different levels of ability, and a lack of ability generally means increased self-consciousness. In contrast, dancing 'performed' at raves blurs the division between ideal and perceived body to enable dancers to very freely move with music without the typical inhibitions

stemming from strong divisions between ideal and perceived bodies. It does this through a new emphasis on the kinetic features of dancing.

Deidre Sklar, in her study of dance, invokes kinesthesia as "a way of knowing, a medium that carries meaning in an immediately felt, somatic mode" (2000, 70)(see also Sklar 1999). Electronic music dancing emphasizes those kinesthetic aspects. Simply put, people dance because it physically feels good. The entire dance environment is created to emphasize the physical. One watches the patterns of the lights, feels the textures of the music, and moves in the open space. The dance is felt, understood somatically as movement, not as formal structure with steps to be followed. Exertion is part of a physical, aural, visual, textural, world. The music is constant – there is no 'right' time to start or stop dancing, people do not dance with partners or even in groups as such. Some dance floors are extremely crowded, with dancers touching those next to them. Some dance floors are spread out with room for dancers to move in any direction. People with any body type dance, people of both sexes dance, people from the same 'group' at an event will sometimes dance near the people they came with, or just as often dance in other parts of the dance space. People wave their arms, kick their feet, not necessarily in any particular pattern (though most dancers move in patterns that strike their fancy), generally moving in time with the rhythm of the music.

This is not to say there are not 'better' dancers than others (some move more or less gracefully or acrobatically), or that dancers never follow patterns. There is still an

element of performance for many dancers; as I described, people use flags, dance extravagantly on platforms for others to watch, and break-dance at many large club and party events. However, the vast majority of dancers dance, with essentially no training, by and for themselves.

Conclusions

As I discussed in chapter two, a dance event is one long event with virtually no emphasis on song forms, and instead an emphasis on a multi-hour-long set with breakdowns and buildups. This kind of macro musical form creates an aural world, extra-normal, sustained as long as the music lasts. That aural world is made of music phrases that constantly shift, change, and develop. Buildups and breakdowns, as well as other macro-phrase structures become the larger syntax of that experience. I chapter three I suggested that aural world happens in a physical space, enhanced by a visual world of flashing lights and moving bodies. A world perhaps more open to concepts of collectivity and inhibition, in this chapter I posited the dance world is a place for bodies to dance for the sensation of moving.

Throughout this paper I have described a world, a context for a dance experience. That world has physical properties, based more on sensory stimulation than ideas of identity, community, or subculture. In describing it as such, I contradict much of the popular rhetoric even within the Edmonton dance community. When the Edmonton Right to Dance Coalition was formed in June 2001, they constructed a website

explaining how people could help combat proposed municipal legislation that would restrict dancing in Edmonton. On their site they ask:

> *Does that mean the dance music community is now through in Edmonton?*
> *NO !! Instead it means that our entire scene must stand up and defend*
> *itself.* (etownravepage.com/righttodance)

I question what comprises that community. That scene revolves around similar activities held in different clubs, organized by different promoters, attended by different groups of people. While well over a thousand people did show up to the rally to show support for 'the scene' (large, by Edmonton standards), what held them together was an activity, dancing. While it is exciting to believe that there is a group of dancers who belong to a single community, equally real are the web postings of promoters who constantly worry about having enough people at their events, or people wondering what club will be busy that weekend (happybastards.com, etownravepage.com, nexustribe.com, therapyaftehours.com). The notion of a single Edmonton "scene" splinters when examined outside of its cohesion as a group of people threatened by restrictions on their dancing. Communities within a general Edmonton scene tend to form around age groups, small groups of friends who attend the same clubs or events, or types of out-of-club activities (bodybuilders, co-workers, fellow students).

This fracturing creates problems for those trying to either define a particular dance scene, or argue for particular meanings formed around or through that scene. The flip side is that there is, to some extent, a real group of people who *do* go to these clubs and who did sign the petition posted by the Right to Dance Coalition. There are thousands of Edmontonians who love dancing and dance music. This cohesion as a dance scene is achieved through a dance experience. That dance experience is as personal, individual, different as each person who attends an event, yet at the same time exactly the same in different cities, in different communities. Dance spaces look the same, sound very similar, and are filled with people who look very similar. There is a tension between the sameness and different-ness of dance experiences that creates difficulty in trying to define a dance community. By turning to a personal dance experience, the aspects that make these different dance communities look and sound the same, we can come closer to understanding how those communities are formed. It is through the personal and the descriptive that the general and the shared become clear.

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Web Sites

General Sites:

etownravepage.com: general information, links, photos for Edmonton region.

Ravelinks.com: links to rave/club sites in North America

hyperreal.org: information on dance music and drug cultures.

ravesafe.ca: information on dance and drug safety.

dancesafe.org: information on dance and drug safety

Promotion Companies:

nexustribe.com

defstar.com (Calgary-based)

happybastards.com

unionevents.com

katalystevents.com (Calgary-based)

Dance Clubs:

Lushnightclub.com

Therapyafterhours.com

Sublimeafterhours.com

Parliamentclub.com

Musical Example

Natious. *Thrust 1*. Bluestone Records. BS001. 2000. (Recording used by kind permission

of Bluestone Records).

CURSOR

80Min/700MB

DATE

CONTENTS

TITLE

Natious
'Thrust I'
Bluestone Records
2000